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SCHOOL BOARDS AND SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERSHIP, RECOMMENDATIONS AND REPORT OF A SURVEY.

BY- PERKINS, JAMES A. AND OTHERS

NEW YORK STATE REGENTS ADV.COMM.ON EDUC.LEADERSHIP
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THE CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL BOARDS AND THEIR MEMBERS ARE INVESTIGATED, AND A DIFFERENTIATION IS MADE BETWEEN EFFECTIVE AND INEFFECTIVE BOARDS. TWENTY-SEVEN SCHOOL DISTRICTS, STRATIFIED BY REGION AND EFFECTIVENESS, WERE INCLUDED IN THE SAMPLE. INTERVIEWS AND QUESTIONNAIRES WERE USED TO OBTAIN DATA FROM ALL CURRENT BOARD MEMBERS, TWO OF THE MOST RECENTLY RETIRED BOARD MEMBERS, AND THE PRESIDENTS OF TEACHERS' AND PARENTS' ORGANIZATIONS. FOUR SEPARATE CRITERIA WERE USED TO ASSESS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EACH SCHOOL BOARD--(1) A SUBJECTIVE RATING BY EDUCATORS, (2) A SUBJECTIVE RATING BY THE INTERVIEWERS, (3) AN OBJECTIVE COMPARISON WITH SIMILAR SCHOOL DISTRICTS ON PER PUPIL EXPENDITURES FOR INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES, AND (4) AN OBJECTIVE COMPARISON WITH LIKE SCHOOL DISTRICTS ON THE LEVEL OF LOCAL FINANCIAL EFFORT FOR EDUCATION. A SCHOOL BOARD RANKED AS EFFECTIVE ON TWO OF THE FOUR CRITERIA AND AVERAGE ON THE OTHER TWO WAS CONSIDERED EFFECTIVE. THE FINDINGS REVEALED--(1) BOARD MEMBERS TENDED TO BE MIDDLE AGED, FINANCIALLY AND OCCUPATIONALLY ABOVE AVERAGE, WELL-EDUCATED, MALE, PROTESTANT, AND REPUBLICAN, (2) MEMBERS OF EFFECTIVE BOARDS WERE FINANCIALLY MORE SUCCESSFUL, WERE BETTER EDUCATED AND OF HIGHER OCCUPATIONAL STATUS, AND HAD LONGER BOARD EXPERIENCE THAN MEMBERS OF INEFFECTIVE BOARDS, AND (3) EFFECTIVE BOARDS WERE LOCATED IN LARGER AND WEALTHIER DISTRICTS, WERE MORE LIKELY TO USE FORMAL NOMINATING COMMITTEES TO SELECT AND RECRUIT NEW BOARD MEMBERS, AND MORE OFTEN ASSISTED NEW BOARD MEMBERS IN LEARNING THEIR JOB THAN INEFFECTIVE BOARDS. (GB)

SCHOOL BOARDS AND SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERSHIP

recommendations and report of a survey

new york state regents advisory committee on educational leadership.

SCHOOL BOARDS
AND SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Recommendations and Report of a Survey

THE NEW YORK STATE REGENTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ON EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

CORNELL UNIVERSITY
ITHACA, NEW YORK

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

December 16, 1965

Chancellor Edgar W. Couper
Board of Regents of the
University of the State of New York
2 Chenango Street
Binghamton, New York

Dear Dr. Couper:

Recognizing the unprecedented demands placed upon educational leaders in this age, and the very limited knowledge available as to how persons with leadership ability can be identified, prepared and selected for executive and policy-making posts in education, the Board of Regents, in late 1963, established this Advisory Committee on Educational Leadership. A grant from the Carnegie Corporation has supported the work of this group.

The Committee, with a membership of fifteen educators and laymen, has viewed its responsibility as including the following assignments:

1. To study and make recommendations for the improvement of educational leadership in New York State in regard to the administrators in higher education and of public school systems, and to their respective boards of government.
2. To identify where, and by whom, educational leadership is actually exercised.
3. To study present arrangements (formal and otherwise) for training future leaders and to make recommendations for strengthening support of such systems.
4. To discover better ways of identifying potential future leaders and of encouraging them to prepare for and enter into positions of leadership.
5. To examine organizational arrangements in the educational enterprise in an effort to understand whether they facilitate or complicate administrative leadership.
6. To identify improved practices growing out of all of the above points, to encourage their dissemination, and the evaluation thereof.

We present here the first of a series of reports and recommendations based on studies and the deliberations of the Committee. This publi-

cation is concerned with the strengthening of school boards and school board membership. It is the outgrowth of an intensive study of a group of school boards in this state conducted by the staff and consultants. The recommendations are drawn from findings of the study but also from general knowledge of the subject and the judgment and experience of members of the Committee.

It is our hope that this report and recommendations will contribute to knowledge concerning leadership for the boards of governance of our public schools. We hope also that the recommendations may lead to the development of new legislation, new forms of citizen action, and new strategies designed to bring to board membership men and women with demonstrated leadership ability, and to use this ability effectively.

The Committee was fortunate in securing the advice and consulting services of a number of knowledgeable laymen and educators. We are truly indebted to these persons and take this opportunity to express our appreciation for their help.

We also appreciate the close and effective cooperation given to this study by the State Education Department staff and officers, and by the leadership of the New York State School Boards Association. Twenty-seven school districts of the State helped especially to make the study possible, and we express our thanks to the participating individuals in these districts.

A subcommittee on school board leadership had as members, Kenneth Buhrmaster, Earl Brydges, and Max Rubin. Mr. Rubin, who chaired the subcommittee, has now left the Committee to become a member of the Board of Regents.

Respectfully submitted,

JAMES A. PERKINS, *Chairman*
Regents Advisory Committee
on Educational Leadership

EWALD B. NYQUIST, *Vice Chairman*
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The Regents Advisory Committee on Educational Leadership was established in late 1963 to undertake studies and develop recommendations concerning the recruitment, preparation, induction, and development of effective educational leaders, both lay and professional, for all levels of the educational system of New York State. One of the subcommittees, consisting of Kenneth Buhrmaster, Earl W. Brydges, and Max J. Rubin, has had as its special concern the leadership of members of school boards.

The recommendations which follow are based on information obtained by studies conducted by the Committee and its staff, on the previously derived state of knowledge concerning school board membership, and on the experience and judgment of the Committee itself. These recommendations deal with certain but not all of the special problems facing large urban communities. The Committee is mindful of the need to make a special examination of the large urban settings.

The statement reflects the considered judgment of the Committee at this stage of study and deliberations. Other recommendations concerning school board leadership may be made at a later date.

Following the recommendations is a report of a study of selected school boards undertaken by the staff in the fall and winter of 1964. This study provided much information of value to the Committee in formulating recommendations.

SCHOOL BOARDS AND SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERSHIP

RECOMMENDATIONS

THE REGENTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

I.

Recommendations Concerning the Definition of School Board Functions

It is important in the development of leadership on School Boards that there be as clear an understanding as possible of the responsibilities of the Board, vis-a-vis both the Chief School Officer and the State.

It is constantly repeated that the Board has the responsibility for making all policies while the Chief School Officer has the responsibility for the administration of those policies. But the State Education Law contradicts this concept. It imposes upon the Board the final responsibility for many administrative matters. Although Boards may act upon these quite mechanically, nevertheless the mere fact that these are Board responsibilities involves the Board in administrative matters that should belong to the Superintendent.

Furthermore, there is increasing evidence that Boards do not in fact lead in the determination of educational policy, but act to implement and support programs determined either by the State or by the professional administrators.

Therefore:

A. *The proper role of the Board of Education needs to be reconsidered and redefined at the State level in such a way as to indicate clearly the purposes and functions of the Board.*

B. *The State Education Law should be revised as promptly as possible to transfer administrative responsibilities from the Board to the Chief School Officer.*

The State Legislature has a committee charged with revising State Education Law, but this project will take several years. The amendment we propose need not wait for the total revision.

C. *The State Education Law and Commissioner's Regulations should be revised to eliminate or reduce trivial and unnecessarily restrictive requirements, especially those governing the design and construction of school buildings.*

Minimum standards must be maintained, but the State should be less specific about them and should assess Board decisions in their entirety. Certain laws or regulations, especially those which dictate size and space minima in school buildings, often operate to restrict Board discretion unnecessarily. Current innovations in curriculum,

teaching methods, school design, and building materials create a situation in which minor restrictions may inhibit improvements in school construction. Local Boards must have more freedom to experiment with such innovations.

We suggest that the State reconsider its reporting and accounting requirements, and eliminate unimportant or unnecessarily burdensome requirements wherever possible.

While we recognize the importance of the principle of conflict-of-interest laws, we suggest that the State reconsider and reinterpret their effect. Such laws bar from Board decisions any members whose business or professional interests profit from such decisions. If taken literally as now written, they might disqualify a great many potentially valuable members. In some areas, these laws are rigidly interpreted and applied; in other areas they are given a loose interpretation. The State should examine these laws, assuring that their intent and application are clear and consistent.

The general nature of the revision of State Education Law and Commissioner's Regulations will of course be determined by the mandate developed for Boards by the State, suggested above.

II.

Recommendations Concerning the Identification and Recruitment of Persons for School Board Service

The COEL study of Boards indicated that the quality of Board members is substantially better where some form of nominating committee is employed, where "the office seeks the man" rather than "the man seeks the office."

Where no such procedure exists, either the existing Board, pressure groups or individual whim fills the gap. None of these is an attractive alternative.

Therefore:

A. *The State Education Department should strongly urge all school districts to establish screening and nominating machinery for Board membership.*

The Department should submit to each district a number of plans for such machinery, so that the district may select whichever method is most appropriate and with such modifications as may meet the particular needs of that district. In this effort, the Department should encourage state and local educational groups, both lay and professional, to assist in the effort of reaching into each community to recruit talent for school board membership.

The existence of such nominating machinery would have several beneficial effects: 1) it would tend to involve community leaders more directly in school affairs: they may help choose candidates if they themselves do not wish to serve; 2) it would lead to the development of more definite criteria for the office than now exist; and 3) it would lead to a deliberate search for leadership talent, a matter presently left largely to chance.

The State should see that the possibility of nomination by petition, as is now done, be left available, to prevent undue domination by the nominating body.

The use of a nominating body should be urged whether the Board is elected or appointed.

B. *These nominating bodies should then be urged to employ extreme care and thoroughness in affirmatively seeking out the best talent available in the community.*

Such nominating committees should not merely pass upon names submitted by others. They should actively and aggressively seek out

and encourage the candidacy of desirable talent in the community.

This committee, along with other civic organizations, should enlist the cooperation of industry, business, unions, universities and colleges, and other groups in making possible the services of qualified people. For example, if the service of a university faculty member is desired and his ability to serve is hampered by his program as a teacher, the university should be asked and be willing to make allowance in that man's teaching schedule. The same should apply to executives of corporations or unions.

The following additional recommendations are made for the general guidance of these nominating bodies.

1. Clear and definite qualifications for Board membership should be developed and made well known to the community, and should be subject to continuing review and revision.
2. A common problem faced by nominating committees is that good candidates are sometimes unwilling to face public competition for a position on the Board. Some committees have attempted to solve this by nominating only one candidate for each vacancy, leaving open the possibility of competition through nomination by petition. Others have nominated two or more for each vacancy. The choice of strategy must depend on the situation.
3. There are no definite characteristics which universally describe good board members. This must be left to the discretion of each community.

The COEL study indicated, however, that members of effective boards tend to have the following characteristics. They are reported here only for the information of nominating bodies. Such information may or may not be useful.

Members of effective boards in the COEL study:

1. Were likely to have achieved success in their occupations and some degree of standing in the community, prior to board service.
2. Were likely to be engaged in professions, or in positions of supervision and leadership in some occupation.
3. Were unlikely to be actively engaged in politics at the community, state or national levels.
4. Were well-educated, most of them having attended or graduated from college.

Finally, the COEL study indicated that a relatively untapped source of potential leadership exists in the ranks of homemakers, and women in the professions.

III.

Recommendations Concerning the Orientation of School Board Members

Existing programs for the orientation of new school board members and the continuing orientation of members of longer service are inadequate. At the present time, the State Education Department offers a single one-day meeting annually for this purpose, a meeting held in August at Albany, and therefore not attended by a large majority of board members.

The State School Boards Association conducts an annual three-day convention in Syracuse in the fall. While it is to be commended for its record, it should be realized that any program offered to all boards in the State is perforce general in approach, and correspondingly of less specific value.

The School Board Institutes are arms of the School Boards Association. Nine Institutes now exist, and include as members only 53% of the School Boards within their areas. Two large areas of the State presently lack the service of a School Board Institute, although an Institute is being formed for one of these at the present time. In short, the services of School Board Institutes are used by about half the School Boards in the State.

Recent evidence indicates that few school boards employ regular programs of orientation at the local level. Such functions are usually left to the Chief School Officer, or are not performed in any regular and systematic way at all.

More attention needs to be given by all parties to the continuing orientation of board members.

Therefore:

A. *The State School Boards Association should be commended for its efforts, and should be encouraged to consider the feasibility of more regional special-problem conferences which might more effectively meet the needs of Boards.*

The present Annual Convention of the Association is of great value, but is of necessity general in approach. Regional special-problem conferences could render more specific service—for example, a conference in the North Country on the problems of recruiting and holding quality teachers, or a conference on Long Island addressed to the problems of rapidly growing districts.

B. *The School Board Institutes should be commended for the quality of their programs, and should encourage the Boards in their areas to participate in them; Institutes should be established in areas now without such service; and Institutes should consider the establishment of separate, special sessions for new-member orientation.*

Only one of the nine Institutes regularly offers a series of special orientation programs for new board members. The other Institutes should be encouraged to consider the adoption of similar programs.

The State Education Department should make its personnel freely available for such sessions.

C. *The State Education Department should expand and improve its orientation program for board members in the following ways: 1) workshops should be held regionally in order to obtain better attendance; 2) these workshops should devote primary attention to a clear and concise definition of the proper role of Boards in relation to the administrator and in relation to the statewide educational system.*

The State Education Department, having once developed a proper definition of the function and purposes of Boards, should continue annually to explain this definition to new board members.

In addition to the legislative correction recommended above, the subject of Board versus Chief School Officer duties should be much more extensively considered at these regional meetings, as well as at various Institute meetings. In such conferences Chief School Officers as well as Board members should participate. Practical, concrete examples of ambiguous or border-line issues should be discussed frankly. In this way Chief School Officers and Board members will gain insight into the subject itself, as well as its treatment in other school districts. This would be valuable orientation for new members as well as old.

D. *The State Education Department should continue to circulate printed orientation materials as it now does, and should consider the additional publication of a "Commissioner's Letter to Boards" or some similar, regular communication directly to Board members.*

Such newsletters are now issued by the School Boards Association and are highly praised by Board members. Association Newsletters should be continued, but the State Education Department should develop organs of its own.

At the present time, most materials prepared by the Department are distributed through the Chief School Officer as a matter of economy and convenience. Such a practice sometimes results in the failure of Board members to receive materials. The Department should there-

fore develop and maintain a master listing of Board members throughout the State, and mail its communications directly to Board members.

E. *Each School Board should be urged to develop and use its own continuing orientation program, designed for the benefit of both new and old members, and planned and led by the School Board President.*

Each board faces problems peculiarly its own. For this reason, it is necessary that local orientation be a matter of continuing concern. We feel that the School Board President should take the initiative in planning and directing such orientation, using the resources of the Chief School Officer, his staff, and other Board members.

IV.

Recommendations Concerning the Organization and Processes of Boards

While the identification and recruitment of leadership talent is COEL's central concern, it is true that the organizational and procedural contexts through which boards operate have some effect in either releasing or inhibiting the exercise of effective leadership.

Therefore:

A. *The reorganization of school districts into larger units should continue to be urged for many reasons, including the fact that larger communities offer greater pools of potential leadership talent for Boards of Education.*

There is evidence that while size of community is not the sole explanation of Board quality, the larger a school district the greater its available talent. Small districts suffer not only from limited financial resources, but from limited resources of leadership as well.

B. *Boards of Education should be assisted and encouraged to evaluate their own procedures.*

One of the obstacles in obtaining the services of men who must devote much of their time to earning a living, is the fact that Board service consumes many hours every month. The State Education Department, with the advice of the School Boards Association, should issue to all Boards recommendations regarding procedures which would eliminate unnecessary expenditure of time. These recommendations would apply to the conduct of formal meetings as well as work done between meetings. If this is coupled with the clarification of Board responsibility proposed above, it should result in making Board membership a more manageable job.

Boards are in theory representative of and responsive to the community and the school staff. They should therefore make greater effort to develop systematic channels by which community and staff reaction to board policy may be determined and assessed.

Boards should be encouraged, as they are now, to develop and use written policies. They should be wary, however, of falling into the easy trap of placing written policies on the books and assuming that to be sufficient per se. Written policies do not guarantee a clear division of responsibility; they are effective only if well understood, regularly consulted and continually revised.

C. *Boards of Education should be urged and assisted to develop and apply specific criteria for the employment and evaluation of their Chief School Officers.*

One of the most important functions of a Board is the selection of a chief administrator for the school system. There is evidence that such selections are not always carefully made. In such cases the inferior abilities of the Chief School Officer may seriously hamper the effectiveness of the Board.

Each Board should develop specific criteria which describe the kind of experience, preparation and qualities it seeks in a Chief School Officer. It then should utilize careful screening procedures during recruitment, perhaps employing professional consultants for this purpose.

The use of such consultants is advised, with the caveat that the use of consultants should not be made an excuse for the Board to fail to exercise its singular responsibility of determining the district's needs in an administrator.

We favor current efforts to improve certification requirements for Chief School Officers. However, there is a growing requirement that Chief School Officers in urban and large suburban districts possess skill and insight in handling social and political problems. Such skill and insight is not easily developed in standard preparation programs for administrators. Therefore, we feel that certification requirements should not be so rigid as to exclude the employment of men with such skills where they are needed. Alternative routes to certification should be considered. We cannot presently suggest what alternative routes should be available, but we do feel that the possibility should be explored.

While we emphasize that the Board should not become involved in administration, the Board has the duty to evaluate the quality of administration by its Chief School Officer. This task of evaluation is a difficult one, and it becomes increasingly difficult with the growing size of school districts. The State Education Department, again enlisting the assistance of the School Boards Association and utilizing the knowledge developed by the School Quality Measurements Project, should propose techniques and criteria for evaluation to Boards.

D. *The time of election of Board members, the size of the Board, and the length of term should be reconsidered by each district.*

While none of the following suggestions should have the force of law, we recommend that Boards consider them for local adoption.

We feel that School Board elections should be held in April or earlier, with successful candidates taking office in July. This would

enable each member-elect to attend and observe meetings from April through June, the period during which the budget is prepared and adopted and the following year is planned. This would greatly assist in the more rapid orientation of new members.

Under State Education Law, Boards may consist (in most districts) of 3, 5, 7, or 9 members. The proper size of the Board depends on the nature of the community. However, the COEL Study suggests that 7 or 9 man Boards may operate more effectively than smaller Boards, probably because of the breadth and diversity of opinion available and because the burden of Board work is more diffused. We believe that in many cases, but certainly not in all, an increase in the size of the Board may enhance its effectiveness.

Finally, we suggest that three-year terms be used whenever possible. Shorter terms are undesirable because the orientation of a new board member requires a long time. Longer terms might discourage high-quality persons from committing themselves to such long service. A three-year term, with re-elections possible where desirable, seems an appropriate compromise.

E. *The annual public vote on the school budget, presently required in all but city school districts, should be replaced by a budget hearing only.*

It is common knowledge that the School Board is the only important body of government which must annually submit to popular vote the amount and disposition of its funds. Board members are required to devote many long hours to preparing for and winning the annual budget approval. Budgets and bond issues are sometimes defeated for reasons only indirectly related to the school. The nature of the whole-or-none voting technique is unrealistic: various voters may each disapprove one small category of the budget, but can only express this disapproval by a vote against the whole budget. This may result in the defeat of a budget, most of which is approved by every voter.

Existing legislation governing school budget approval presents an almost nonsensical pattern. The board must present its budget to the voters. If the voters disapprove, the State imposes an austerity budget. Even though no full definition of an austerity budget has yet been developed, it is well known that an austerity budget is very nearly in the same amount as the regular proposed budget. Voter disapproval therefore amounts to the denial of marginal services which represent only a small percentage of the total budget.

The School Board, like other legislative bodies of government, should be able to determine budget and tax rate without submitting this to an annual vote. The public should utilize with School Boards

the same avenues of recourse exercised with other governmental bodies—that is, the defeat or re-election of incumbents at succeeding elections.

If it is felt that a limit on the taxing power of the School Board is desirable, such safeguards as are now used in city school districts in New York State can be adopted.

V.

Further Recommendations Concerning the Role of the State Education Department in Developing More Effective Leadership on School Boards

The State Education Department has a responsibility to exercise leadership of its own, which will encourage and enable local Boards to perform their functions more effectively and wisely.

Therefore:

A. *Procedures should be established so that Boards and Chief School Officers may easily submit to the State Education Department their recommendations for legislative and regulatory changes which would enable Boards to function more effectively.*

B. *The State Education Department should work cooperatively with organizations interested in education in promoting greater understanding of the schools' impact on general community problems and directions.*

Boards of Education continue to become increasingly involved with social, economic, and other problems that affect the whole community. It is a responsibility of the State Education Department to furnish practical advice and guidance to Boards, and to assist in the development of better public understanding of such problems.

C. *The State Education Department should continuously inform Boards and Chief School Officers of developments in programs of federal aid to education.*

With the advent of large federal assistance programs, local Boards face a bewildering array of projects, programs and regulations. The Department should keep local districts informed as programs and ideas are developed in Washington and Albany, thus reducing the burden upon Boards and Chief School Officers.

D. *Board leadership should be a subject of continuing concern to the State Education Department.*

This assessment of Board leadership results from the creation of a special committee to examine leadership in the educational system of the State. More permanent machinery should be established for the continuing evaluation of Board performance, so that the Department and the local communities are constantly aware of trends and developments.

SCHOOL BOARDS AND SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERSHIP

REPORT OF A SURVEY

Conducted by the Staff of the

Regents Advisory Committee on Educational Leadership

F. H. STUTZ, *Project Director*
R. G. MORROW, *Associate Director*
K. H. BLANCHARD, *Administrative Assistant*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project began and flourished under the guidance and encouragement of the COEL Subcommittee on School Boards—Max Rubin, Kenneth Buhrmaster and Earl Brydges. To them we owe a debt of gratitude only partially repaid by this acknowledgment.

At all stages of the project, from design to analysis, we received invaluable assistance from Cornell professors of education D. J. McCarty, Joän Roos Egner, and Douglas Pierce (now at the University of Minnesota). Robert Wuerthner, graduate student at Cornell, contributed to the design of the study. Florence Bank and Dieter Paulus handled the statistical work with skill and dispatch. Edward Hickcox offered valuable criticisms of the manuscript.

Everett Dyer and Lyle J. Schoenthal of the New York State School Boards Association and Nathan Kullman of the New York State Teachers Association promptly and cheerfully responded to our frequent calls for information.

We appreciate the critical appraisals of our research instruments and the suggestions made by a number of distinguished scholars: Marvin Alkins, Professor of Education at UCLA; Selwyn Becker, Professor of Business Administration at the University of Chicago; Joseph Cronin, Assistant Director of the Stanford University School Board Studies Program; Neal Gross, Professor of Education at Harvard; H. Thomas James, Professor of Education at Stanford; Ralph Kimbrough, Professor of Education at the University of Florida; Robert McGinnis, Professor of Sociology at Cornell; Matthew B. Miles, Professor of Education at Columbia; Thomas Whisler, Professor of Psychology at the University of Chicago; Lawrence K. Williams, Professor of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell; and Robin M. Williams, Jr., Professor of Sociology at Cornell.

The twenty interviewers who shouldered the main burden of data collection deserve our plaudits and our lasting gratitude. Without their skill, devotion and enthusiasm, the study would not have been possible.

Mrs. Lorena Marsters, Mrs. Doris Smith, and Mrs. Nancy McAfee aided us throughout the enterprise.

Finally, we reserve our most profound appreciation for the patience and cooperation of the 287 board members, administrators, teachers and interested laymen who participated in the study. They endured lengthy interview sessions with good grace, sharing with us their candid opinions and offering valuable insights about boards and boardsmanship.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

The Need for the Study

We are in the midst of what Peter Drucker has called the "Educational Revolution:"

> "An abundant and increasing supply of highly educated people has become the absolute prerequisite of social and economic development in our world. It is rapidly becoming a condition of national survival."*

Education is being recognized as an investment more vital to this nation's welfare than its traditional investment in material goods. As the educational system assumes greater significance, more enlightened and more effective leadership is demanded for our schools.

Despite these unprecedented demands, there is meager knowledge as to how persons with leadership potential can be identified, selected and trained for positions of responsibility in education. Much of the current literature on school boards, for example, is exhortative and not based on the systematic accumulation of hard facts. Excellent analyses of single school boards exist, to be sure, but the narrowness of their approach reduces their usefulness. Some careful, scientific studies of larger samples have been made, but their pertinence to the current situation in New York State is limited. In short, there is a dearth of information about boards and board membership in New York State at the current time.

In late 1963 the Regents Advisory Committee was established to undertake studies and develop recommendations concerning the identification, recruitment and orientation of effective educational leadership, both lay and professional, at all levels in the educational system of New York State. An important part of its mandate was to examine the nature of leadership on public school boards. A Subcommittee formed for this purpose included COEL members Kenneth Buhrmaster, Chairman of the New York State Educational Conference Board; the Honorable Earl W. Brydges, Senator for the 54th District of the State of New York; and Max J. Rubin, former President of the New York City Board of Education. Mr. Rubin has recently resigned from the Committee, having been elected to membership on the New York State Board of Regents.

Under the Subcommittee's supervision, the COEL Staff conducted

*Peter F. Drucker, "The Educational Revolution," in Amitai and Eva Etzioni, editors, *Social Change: Sources, Patterns and Consequences,* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), p. 236.

this survey in an attempt to add to existing knowledge some concrete data about school boards in this state at the present time.

This report is offered as one additional piece of evidence in the continuing search for knowledge about the governance of our schools.

Objectives of the Study

This survey had as its objectives: 1) to look at the job of the school board carefully in a variety of settings; 2) to study the personal characteristics of board members; 3) to examine the processes used by school districts to select, recruit and induct new board members; 4) to determine motives for accepting board candidacy and for refusing such candidacy; 5) to examine the operational processes and functions of boards, especially as these might enhance or inhibit the exercise of school board leadership; and 6) to suggest, if possible, how effective boards differ from ineffective boards in each of these respects.

The twenty-seven districts in the study reported here ranged in size and type from small rural schools to large suburban or small city schools. The Subcommittee also received separately an analysis of school board leadership in one of the large cities of the State, based on a survey conducted for the Subcommittee by a prominent educator. We recognize, however, that the large city districts of this state face unique and complex problems which will require further study and attention.

The Sample

Twenty-seven school districts participated in the study. Since a major emphasis of the inquiry was to determine some differences between effective and ineffective boards, initial sample selection was made as follows:

1. Reputable public school superintendents, professors of education, and officials of educational associations were asked to nominate, each from the region with which he was most familiar, a number of school boards considered to be effective, a number judged average in effectiveness, and a number considered to be ineffective. At least two, and in one case five, persons in each of ten regions* of the state made independent nominations. Additionally, two persons in positions to do so made a number of nominations from the state at large.

*The regions used for this study were these: *Western New York*—Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara and Wyoming Counties; *Alfred Area*—Allegany, Cattaraugus and Steuben Counties; *Genesee Valley Area*—Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, and Yates Counties; *The Southern Tier*—Broome, Chemung,

2. One hundred ninety-nine nominations were obtained by the means described. Of these, eighteen were dropped because they received differing evaluations—e.g. as "average" by one judge but "ineffective" by another. Two others were dropped because they had already been contacted to participate in a pilot study for the testing of survey instruments. Seven more were omitted because they were districts in which our interviewers resided; we felt that no interviewer should participate in a study which included his home district.
3. The remaining one hundred seventy-two districts were stratified first according to region, and second according to judged effectiveness. For example, categories were established of schools in Western New York judged to be effective, schools in Western New York judged to be average, and so on. Thirty such categories were obtained, and a random choice of one from each category was made.

   Of the thirty schools in the original selection, eight refused participation for a variety of reasons. Alternative random selections were made, and five of the eight alternative choices agreed promptly to cooperate in the study. In three instances, we were unable to secure the cooperation of the alternative selections in time. Hence the final sample consisted of twenty-seven schools.

Procedures for Implementing the Study

Starting with the broad goals stipulated by the Subcommittee on School Boards, the COEL Staff began the development of appropriate instruments during the summer of 1964.

The first step was an examination of the literature and consultation with some recognized experts on school boards, to identify areas of recurring interest (e.g. motivation, selection processes, the importance of written policy, the methods of chief school officer selection). It became apparent that two instruments would be needed: a brief questionnaire to establish personal data about each respondent, and an interview instrument which would probe in depth his views about certain problems.

Schuyler, Tioga, and Tompkins Counties; *Central New York*—Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, and Oswego Counties; *The Oneonta Area*—Chenango, Delaware, Otsego and Sullivan Counties; *The North Country*—Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Hamilton, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence, Warren and Washington Counties; *The Capital District*—Albany, Fulton, Montgomery, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady and Schoharie Counties; *The Mid-Hudson Area*—Columbia, Dutchess, Greene, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Ulster and Westchester Counties; and *Long Island*—Nassau and Suffolk Counties.

Crude versions of both instruments were prepared and submitted to more than a dozen specialists for critical comment. The appropriateness of content was assessed by professors of education and business administration. Procedural and technical revisions were suggested by experts in survey research, and professors of psychology and sociology.

Improved versions were then field-tested in two widely different schools in the State. Careful study of the results led to more revisions, especially in the wording of questions.

The instruments which emerged were wide in scope, designed to elicit information about a broad range of topics. A narrower focus might have been more scientific, but we were not then (nor are we now) prepared to label very many areas of inquiry as irrelevant. Such an approach inevitably results in some wasted effort, but it has the virtue of not arbitrarily omitting any potential avenues to insight.

The choice of interviewers to carry out the survey presented a special problem. The use of graduate students or others equally distant from the world of boardsmanship had much to commend it: they would be non-threatening and therefore likely to secure candid replies. Yet their very lack of familiarity with the problems and language of board service would probably have led to misinterpretation and loss of information, especially in those questions where the respondent was invited to discuss his reply freely and at length. Furthermore, many of our consultants indicated that, in their experience, school people dissemble little and indeed welcome the chance to be frank, no matter who conducts the interview. We therefore decided to invite retired school superintendents and board members to carry out the study for us, confident that they would achieve good rapport, and fully understand and accurately record all they were told.

Twenty interviewers were selected from a list nominated by the same panel which had nominated boards to be studied. These interviewers carried out the study as teams, each team consisting of a retired chief school officer (a man) and a retired or current board member (a woman).

The interviewers attended a training session on October 17, 1964, a session designed to acquaint them with the plan of study and the proper use of the instruments. The training was conducted by Professor Donald J. McCarty of Cornell, who has had much experience in such studies and who had worked closely with this study from its inception.

Each interviewing team contacted all the present board members, two (in some cases three) of the most recently retired board members, the president of the teachers' organization, and the president of the parents' organization in each district they visited. All twenty-seven

chief school officers were contacted and interviewed by members of the COEL Staff.

Each respondent received the Personal Data Questionnaire one week in advance of his interview appointment, and was asked to have it completed and ready for collection at the time of the interview. Interviews were conducted between October 1964 and February 1965. They ranged from an hour and twenty minutes to four hours in length, averaging just over two hours.

On February 20, 1965, the COEL Staff met with the interviewers to discuss their impressions and to develop some preliminary recommendations for the consideration of the Subcommittee. Each interviewer was requested to prepare a frankly subjective appraisal of each of the boards he studied, to be used as a second criterion of effectiveness.

From March through June 1965, the COEL Staff itself, and several graduate students briefed for the purpose, coded the data according to response categories developed by the COEL Staff. These categories had been formulated from a preliminary reading of about one-fifth of the protocols. Since many of our questions were the free-response kind which required judgment in the coding of responses, close supervision and frequent spot-checking of the coders was carried out by the Staff. The information was entered on punch cards and electronically processed.

During the early summer of 1965 it became apparent that more information was needed about various regional and statewide orientation programs being offered for board members. The Staff obtained and analyzed the programs of the New York State School Boards Conventions for 1961 through 1964, and the programs and related materials of the Albany Workshop for New School Board Members ("Commissioner's Conference") for 1962 through 1965. The Staff also acquired information about the various School Board Institute programs for the year 1964–65, from questionnaires completed by the Institute Directors for the School Boards Association.

In July and August, interpretations and summaries of the findings and some tentative recommendations were forwarded to the Subcommittee for its consideration.

The Criteria of Effectiveness

The basic purposes of this survey were two: 1) to establish some general characteristics of a number of fairly representative school boards in this State; and 2) to attempt to discover those characteristics which differentiate effective from ineffective boards. Performance

of the first task, by comparison, was easy. It essentially required summaries of replies to our questions. The second task immediately brought us face-to-face with a difficulty endemic to educational research. Roald Campbell defines it ably:

> "Evaluation of results in education is a difficult process. In business, one can use sales or production as evaluation measures. In the military, objectives are definite and their achievement relatively easy to ascertain. In at least some aspects of government, results tend to be rather concrete.... In education, however, evaluation is particularly complex. In the first place, there are still large areas of disagreement as to what the schools should be about, anyway—witness the current uncertainty of what it is that the American high school ought to be doing."*

Campbell was addressing the problem of measuring the administrator's effectiveness, but little translation is necessary to make the same point about the evaluation of school boards.

One strategy might have been to avoid the problem altogether. We believe, however, that the cause of educational investigation is better served when comparative standards are employed. To seek quality we must attempt to measure it.

It has already been noted that the selection of the sample employed a built-in criterion of quality—that is, the judgment of our original panel as to the effectiveness of the boards they nominated. These panel members were in positions to judge the relative quality of a number of boards within their purview. Most were professors whose commitments to the schools brought them wide contacts, or superintendents whose own professional activity familiarized them with large numbers of boards. Two were educational association officers whose acquaintance with school boards was statewide.

Original evaluations by the panel were cross-checked to an extent. Any boards differentially rated by two or more on the panel were immediately dropped from consideration.

A second evaluative criterion came naturally to hand. Our women interviewers themselves had had years of experience with one or more boards, and had participated in board association activities (often as leaders). The men were retired school administrators whose exposure to boards, though different in perspective, was equally extensive. We asked each of these interviewers, on the basis of the information he had gathered and his own judgment, to rate each school board he studied as "effective," "average" or "ineffective." These also were cross-checked

*Roald F. Campbell, "Peculiarities in Educational Administration," Andrew W. Halpin, editor, *Administrative Theory in Education*, Chicago: Midwest Administration Center, 1958, pp. 174–5.

for agreement: any board rated ineffective by one interviewer and effective by the other was left "unclassified."

We had therefore two sets of frankly subjective evaluations of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of our boards. There are of course, weaknesses in criteria of this sort. Our judges were using frames of reference peculiarly their own. Even if they agreed upon the assessment of a certain board, they might be proceeding to that agreement from different starting points.

We decided that still other criteria should be employed. Most of us will agree that financial effort is a necessary condition for good education, if not a sufficient condition. The pouring of dollars into a school system does not guarantee a superior program; but a superior program is virtually impossible without a sufficient flow of funds. The board of education, whatever else it does, is primarily responsible for securing a reasonable financial effort from its constituency, and for seeing that school funds are used to the maximum educational benefit of the students.

With such a rationale, we employed two financial criteria in rating our boards. The first was a measure of the local financial effort each board was able to secure. Local effort was defined as local property and other taxes raised for the school system, divided by the true valuation of taxable property in the district.* The figure thus obtained represented the percentage of the total true value of taxable property which was devoted, in the form of taxes, to the school system in 1962–63.

A second financial criterion was per pupil expenditure for instructional services. A large school income may be wasted, so to speak, if a disproportionate share of that income is spent on ancillary services which contribute only indirectly to the instruction of children. The budget category of "instructional services" includes such items as teachers' salaries and instructional supplies, and does not include amounts spent for building improvements, transportation, bonded indebtedness, and so on.

We found that New York State schools vary widely on both these financial indices. The level of local effort, for example, is usually higher in heavily suburban areas than in less well-settled regions. Per pupil expenditures vary with the size of enrollment; very small schools must expend considerably more per pupil to maintain a program of minimum quality, due to the inefficiency of their size.

For these reasons, each of the 27 schools in the sample was compared on effort percentage and per pupil expenditures for instructional

*Figures used for the effort percentage and per pupil expenditures were obtained from the *Annual Educational Summary 1962–63*, Albany: The State Education Department, Bureau of Statistical Services.

services, with other schools *of the same approximate size in the same region* of the state.* If a school ranked above average for schools the same size in the same region, we called it effective on that criterion; if it ranked below average, we called it ineffective.

To summarize: we had developed four separate criteria by which to assess the effectiveness of each of our school boards: 1) a subjective rating by our original panel of nominators; 2) a subjective rating by our interviewers; 3) an objective comparison with similar schools on the amount expended per pupil for instructional services; and 4) an objective comparison with similar schools on the level of local financial effort for education.

For the purposes of analysis, we considered a school board to be effective if it ranked "effective" on at least two of the four criteria, and ranked "average" on the others. Ten of our twenty-seven schools so qualified, and are reported in the findings as effective boards.

A board was considered ineffective if it ranked "ineffective" on at least two of the criteria and "average" on the others. Seven schools met these conditions and are reported as "ineffective" boards.

The ten remaining schools received strongly contradictory ratings on the four criteria. They are included in the report under "general" findings.

We recognize of course that the employment of such relatively stringent criteria reduces the number of effective and ineffective boards to the point where generalization is risky. However, since our intent is to suggest differences between effective and ineffective boards, we preferred to use criteria which would sharpen the contrast, and lead us to insights which otherwise might be blurred.

Limitations of the Study

It is well to admit at the outset that this study, like most, suffers a number of significant limitations.

Designed to explore and suggest broad patterns of board behavior rather than to test and prove specific hypotheses, the study is not grounded in the context of a theoretical framework. It is of the genre researchers call "the status survey." We hope that our findings may suggest some specific foci for more rigorous research. If they do, we will have been partially successful.

Another inherent limitation is that we have relied on self-reported data. Our respondents discussed facts, attitudes and behavior as they

*The regions used for this purpose were the ten used for initial sample selection. The size categories were for enrollment K-12 as follows: 200–500, 501–750, 751–1000, 1001–1500, 1501–2000, 2001–2500, over 2500.

perceived them; their perceptions may be erroneous and far from the "truth" in a few instances. Had our sole purpose been to detect indisputable truths, such a weakness of method would be serious. Our study, however, seeks not only to establish facts, but more importantly to describe the attitudes and behavior of boards and board members. We are reminded of Professor Thomas' dictum:

> ".....If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."*

Board members react to the situations they perceive, mistaken as such perceptions may sometimes be.

Because we used evaluative rather than random sample selection techniques, our findings must be generalized with caution. The boards we studied, for example, are obviously more visible to external observers than other boards may be. They were the ones our nominators remembered, for one reason or another. Nevertheless, we are not sure that the schools in our sample are really atypical in any important way. The reader must be the judge of that.

Finally, our criteria of effectiveness, while as rigorous as most employed in such research, remain disputable. Evaluation of a school board is risky at best, but we feel that it must be attempted. We have used what we believe to be the best criteria available to us.

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*Merton, Robert K. *Social Theory and Social Structure,* The Free Press of Glencoe, 1957, p. 421.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Relation of School Board Quality to Type of Community

The schools in the sample varied widely in size and type. The range in K-12 enrollments as of July 1963 was from 518 to 10,203; median enrollment was 2429. Twelve schools were organized as village superintendencies (independent central or independent union free), eleven as central schools, three as city superintendencies and one was a union free school district. Eleven are best described as small to medium-sized villages in rural areas. Twelve are suburban school systems, peripheral to larger urban complexes. Four are small cities which are industrial as well as residential centers.

An analysis of community characteristics* revealed some interesting differences between the districts with boards we judged effective and those whose boards we called ineffective. Our effective-board communities tended to be more prosperous than the ineffective-board communities. The median annual income of employed males in the former averaged $9405; in the latter $4022. More of the employed males were engaged in professional, managerial or proprietary positions—37% to 24%. Taxable property base per pupil was greater: $26,039 compared to $10,184 for ineffective-board communities.

The education level of residents in effective-board communities was higher. The median amount of formal education for adult males in such communities was 12.1 years, compared to 10.7 years for males in ineffective-board communities.

Effective boards served larger schools, with an average K-12 enrollment of 4081 pupils compared to 1857 in schools served by ineffective boards.

It is tempting to leap to the generalization that board quality depends entirely upon such community characteristics as wealth, educational level and school enrollment. It does seem to be true that when our original panel of judges and our interviewers were asked to rate the quality of school boards, they tended to find the effective boards in larger, wealthier school districts. One might argue that they proceeded from the assumption that such districts automatically have better boards, and that therefore our findings are tautological. Other evidence, however, contradicts such a criticism. The boards judged effective were not all larger than those judged ineffective: four of

*Figures hereafter used to describe community characteristics were obtained from 1960 U.S. Census data.

the latter were about as large or larger than three of the former. A similar overlap exists in regard to per pupil tax base: four ineffectives were about as wealthy or wealthier in this respect than four of the effectives. Three ineffectives had a higher community level of education than three of the effectives.

A better interpretation, and the one we accept, is that our judges found that while other factors enter into board effectiveness, larger and wealthier districts have an advantage in producing boards of high quality. As our interviewer-appraisers expressed it to us, larger, more prosperous communities "possess a greater pool of leadership talent upon which to draw." This, it seems to us, is an eminently sensible observation.

Had we stopped here, we might have been forced to conclude that board quality is chiefly a function of community size, wealth and educational level—that the remedy is to consolidate districts into larger amalgams, and hope for the best. Such a remedy does have much to commend it, but it is not the whole answer. Large, wealthy districts may have an initial advantage in finding leadership talent, but not all such districts have effective boards. By employing two additional criteria which compared boards of similar size on the percentage of their wealth they devote to education, we are in effect attempting to isolate other factors which may explain the varying quality of boards, whatever the size and wealth of the districts they serve.

In short, community characteristics such as income, educational level and enrollment have a strong relation to adjudged board quality; but other factors enter in, many of which are not dependent upon size, wealth and community educational level. These other factors will be discussed below.

The Characteristics of Board Members

Motivation. Operating on a prediction that board quality depends in some measure on the motivation of board members, we asked two questions in an attempt to obtain a general portrait of the reasons that lead citizens to board service. Of board members themselves we asked "What led or prompted you to become a board member?"

Recognizing that self-reported motives may differ markedly from the motivations ascribed to board members by close observers, we asked a second question of all our respondents: "Without identifying individuals, describe the reasons for seeking office of the present board members." (Current board members were asked to exclude themselves in their answers to this question).

In other words, our first question asked board members to report

their own motives. Most, it should be noted, claimed several reasons for deciding to serve. Our second question asked those who were in close contact with our board members—chief school officers, fellow board members, recently retired board members, and parents' and teachers' organization presidents—to describe the motives they felt the board members as a group possessed. Responses to this second question, in other words, indicate the important motivations close observers saw at work among these board members.*

We are dealing here with varying *perceptions* of the motivations of board members; we cannot vouch that any of our respondents reported the *true* reasons men and women choose to serve.

An analysis of the responses in Table 1 reveal certain significant patterns. First, board members themselves and their close observers generally agreed that the chief motives of board members were altruistic—they served because they were asked to do so, they served because they have a genuine interest in the community or in the school system. The prestige associated with the office prompted relatively few.

Second, there was the expected variation between claimed and ascribed motives. Observers tended to ascribe a "genuine interest in education" somewhat more often than board members claim it; they also tended more often to accuse board members of opposing school policies or the rising school tax rate, or of seeking prestige. There seems to have been, in other words, some inclination of the observers to see board members as "good guys" or "bad guys." There was also the interesting inclination among our chief school officers to see more board members as opponents of the existing policies of the school, reflecting what is probably a natural nervousness.

Comparison of the motivations claimed by and ascribed to members of effective and of ineffective boards reveals one interesting difference. Members of effective boards claimed more often (55% to 26%) to have been asked to run for membership by some citizens group, nominating body or the Board itself. This claim was substantiated by their observers: 50% of the observers of effective-board members cited the same motive, compared to 21% of the observers of members of ineffective boards. Supporting the cliche, our study gives some evidence that when elections to effective boards take place, it is more often true that "the office seeks the man rather than the man the office." This will be discussed further in the section on Selection.

Other Personal Characteristics. Each respondent supplied certain basic information about himself by completing a Personal Data Ques-

*No attempt was made to define the *primary* motive of *each* board member, as has been done in more elaborate studies. We felt that a more general approach sufficed for our purposes.

tionnaire. A summary of this information is contained in the Appendix.

Several patterns shown in other studies of board members are repeated here. We found, for example that the average board member

Table 1

The Motivations of Board Members, Self-Reported* and Ascribed by Close Observers,** by Percentage Frequency with which Motive was Claimed or Ascribed

	General			*Effective*			*Ineffective*		
		Ascribed by:			Ascribed by:			Ascribed by:	
Response	Self-reported N=163	Chief School Officer N=27	Other Observers N=260	Self-reported N=62	Chief School Officer N=10	Other Observers N=103	Self-reported N=39	Chief School Officer N=7	Other Observers N=63
Interest in education	42%	70%	61%	42%	100%	63%	40%	43%	63%
Asked to serve by Board or citizens group	41	41	44	55	60	50	26	30	21
Interest in community service	32	37	43	39	30	57	40	30	25
Had children in school	28	37	26	21	20	22	31	30	21
Opposed existing policies	18	30	26	13	20	5	18	43	14
To hold down tax rate	6	22	15	6	20	19	5	14	6
For prestige	4	22	21	2	20	30	5	30	24

*These percentages total more than 100%, since most board members claimed several motives.

**Percentages reported here indicate the number of observers who saw each of these motives as an important one impelling members of their board.

is in his middle or late 40s. Effective and ineffective boards in our study differed little in this respect.

Even in education, long an occupational area in which women have had a major part, relatively few women are elected to lay boards of control. Almost 9 of 10 board members in our sample were male. Effective boards utilized the talents of community women (17% of these board members were female) more fully than ineffective boards (10% female). The more significant point, however, is that women are not as yet utilized as board members to any great extent, by any of the districts we studied.

We included questions concerning the religious and political affiliations of board members, finding much as expected that school board members are overwhelmingly Protestant (72%) and Republican (73%). No important differences of either kind existed between effective and ineffective boards.

It has long been a part of the conventional wisdom that politics and education do not mix. Our boards seemed to have accepted this advice: there was almost no evidence that boards were directly involved in organized political processes for the selection of candidates, for example.

We also asked, however, whether board members have actively engaged in political campaign work, have run for political office, or have held an appointed political office in the last ten years. About half (52%) of the total sample had restricted their overt political involvement to voting; 48% had been more actively involved. Effective boards differed markedly from ineffectiveness in this respect. 46% of the former had been active (beyond voting) in politics, while 60% of the members of ineffective boards had been so engaged. In short, although boards themselves seemed relatively free of political influence as boards, members of ineffective boards tended considerably more often to have had recent external political involvements than their counterparts on effective boards.

The data in Appendix A illustrates the considerable diversity of occupations on all the boards in our sample. There was a slightly greater concentration of business executives and proprietors on effective boards (39% to 22%), and of those occupied in positions requiring professional degrees (32% to 24%)—such as professional engineers, lawyers, educators, researchers, dentists and physicians. The relatively higher occupational levels of effective-board members was reflected in the average salary they earned: $17,100 compared to $11,400 for members of ineffective boards. It should be noted that board members in both types of situations averaged considerably higher in occupational status and income than their constituents.

Board members in all the schools we studied had attained a higher average level of formal education than their constituents. Just over half of the total (53%) had acquired at least a bachelor's degree; just over one-fifth had completed work at the master's or doctoral level. These same statistics varied strikingly between members of effective and members of ineffective boards. 70% of the former earned at least the bachelor's degree, compared to 45% of members of ineffective boards. 28% of effective-board members hold master's or doctor's degrees, compared to 18%.

Effective and ineffective board members alike averaged from 10 to 11 hours per month in regular and special board meetings. Members of effective boards averaged an additional 10 to 11 hours monthly fulfilling extra obligations such as attending school functions, delivering talks and speeches, and so on. Ineffective-board members devoted considerably less time (7 hours per month) to such extra duty. We should note before leaving this point that, as a general average, board service in the schools in our sample required about 18 hours of each member's time per month. This is far less than the amount required in larger, more complex situations such as New York City, of course. Nevertheless, it is a great deal more than many other kinds of board service requires—one finds it hard to imagine that bank directors and university trustees devote the equivalent of almost half a work-week monthly to the boards they serve.

The average board member in our sample had about 4½ years service on his board at the time we interviewed him. The range of prior experience was wide: 31% had only one year or less prior service; 11% were in at least their eleventh year. Effective and ineffective boards differed in three important ways in this respect. Members of effective boards were more experienced (4.4 years to 3 years). Fewer of them were novitiates with one year or less experience (29% to 41%); and more of them were "old-timers" of at least ten years' standing (13% to 3%). Our study certainly does not indicate that frequent turnover of board members is a necessary condition for board effectiveness.

To summarize our findings to this point: board members as a population are apparently motivated for the most part by unselfish reasons, according to them and according to their closest observers. The average board member is in his middle 40's; married, with children in school; occupationally and financially successful; and is likely to be a male Protestant Republican. He devotes, without pay, almost half a week's work each month to meetings and other functions required of him as a board member. Finally, he is educated well above the average adult of his community.

Members of effective boards differ from members of ineffective boards in several ways: they are likely to have been approached to run for office, rather than having independently sought the post; they are unlikely to be actively involved in politics at the community, state or national level—except as voters; they are more likely to be engaged in higher-income occupations in the professions or in positions of leadership and control in business; they have attained a higher level of formal education; they devote more time per month to board service; and they have had longer experience as board members.

Factors Which Deter Prospective Board Members

One aim of our study was to discover whether, in the opinions of certain of our respondents, board service was attracting the "best" people in the community, and if not, what was deterring such people from service. It was necessary to ask the question of relatively detached observers of the scene. Board members themselves and their chief school officers were, we felt, likely to be less objective.

We asked all the retired board members, parents organization presidents, and teachers association presidents these questions:

> "Do you feel that board membership attracts the best people? Please explain."
>
> and
>
> "Do you know people who have refused to run, resigned or refused re-election to the school board? If yes, why do you think these persons refused service?"

The general response to the first question was divided. 49% of all these respondents (N=97) agreed that the best people were serving and 51% denied that they were. Effective-board observers were more inclined to be satisfied that the best talent was being tapped (73%) than observers of ineffective boards, (37%).

We analyzed responses to the latter part of the first question and the second question above, to ascertain the nature of the obstacles which prevented persons from running or caused them to leave board service, having once become involved. There were, of course, large numbers who reported that potential or current members had moved from the district, suffered some sort of health failure or had reached advanced age. We do not report these here, since they are relatively unavoidable. Instead, we report in Table 2 the other, more controllable aspects of board service which have acted as deterrents, according to our observers.

The chief deterrent to the recruitment of better talent and the retention of experienced members is the heavy commitment of time demanded by board service. Well over half our respondents indicated

Table 2

Factors Which Deter Persons from Board Service, According to Retired Board Members, Parents Organization Presidents and Teachers Organization Presidents

Response	*General* (N=97)	*Effective* (N=41)	*Ineffective* (N=24)
Lack of time to give to board service.....	60%	73%	71%
Refusal to take abuse from the public.....	36	20	46
Loss of business due to loss of public favor.....	10	5	8
Feeling that he could accomplish little as a board member.....	8	10	4
Dislike of campaigning and risking public defeat	5	10	–
Would lose income due to demands on time....	5	–	8

that the "best" people are already too heavily commited to spare 15 to 20 hours monthly for board service.

A second major deterrent is the abuse and criticism to which taxpayers and parents subject board members. Respondents described it various ways:

> "They face considerable abuse, right or wrong."
> "Why should they take the 'guff' from some of the people in public meetings?"

Potential and experienced members of effective boards are not discouraged as often by public criticism, as their counterparts in ineffective-board situations. 20% of the respondents in effective-board situations reported the deterrent effect of criticism; 46% of the respondents in ineffective-board situations did. Either of two explanations seems reasonable. It may be that talented persons in effective-board communities are inured to criticism, expecting it and therefore being less sensitive about it; or, and this seems more reasonable to us, board members in effective situations are not targets for abuse to the same extent.

If our respondents are correct, a number of promising businessmen refuse to serve because they are convinced they would lose business by alienating the public in the role of board member. Only one respondent indicated that a deterrent was loss of business due to conflict-of-interest legislation, suggesting that such laws do not loom large as obstacles.

Three other barriers were cited and are of interest. 5% indicated that more good people might serve if they were offered financial compensation for their time. Another 5% felt that some avoid board

membership because they dislike public campaigning and the risk of public defeat.

Finally, 8% of our respondents indicated that talented board members are deterred or lost because of a general feeling that, as board members, they could do little to change the course of school affairs. One reported that some good men refused board membership because "it is the Superintendent who wields the power, and what can a board member do to make a difference?" A second recounted the resignation of one valuable board member who had dealt with an intractable chief school officer for some time and had come to the conclusion that "if you try to make improvements, you knock your head against a stone wall!" One other respondent reported that a potentially useful board member was convinced that "the universities were taking over."

The Selection of Board Members

Most governmental agencies which are granted important policy and taxation powers recruit their members through formal, often elaborate political processes. Candidates for city councils, town boards, state legislatures and the like are carefully screened and must meet certain clear criteria.

The school board is a governmental agency of the same kind: it is expected to exercise broad policy discretion, and its annual tax revenues often exceed those of the local political government. In many localities, the school is the largest and most expensive public endeavor.

We knew that the school board, unlike other public bodies with similar powers, has traditionally avoided political processes for selection of its members, at least in the smaller, less urban school districts of this State. If board members are not selected politically, how are they chosen? What process has substituted for the political machinery? We devoted a part of our interviews to a discussion of the selection processes in use in the twenty-seven school districts of our sample.

The Use of Nominating Committees. We asked, first of all, whether any organized machinery for selection exists: "Does this community have a nominating or screening committee?" and "If yes, what group or groups sponsor this committee?"

Our respondents indicated, as we expected, that formal nominating machinery is the exception rather than the rule. Twenty-two of the twenty-seven schools had utilized no formal or informal machinery in the past few years; only five had. Of the five, two school districts had formalized the machinery to the extent that its methods and criteria were recorded and publicized. Three used somewhat less definite procedures, having what are best termed "de facto" screening commit-

tees. In all cases, these committees were sponsored by interested parents and taxpayers groups, civic clubs and other non-political organizations.

Of the ten effective boards, four had used or were using such formal or de facto machinery. Two of these had recently abandoned the use of de facto nominating committees, largely because of a feeling that these committees had lost their representativeness and had failed to consider all the aspects of the situation. "That other group was influential, but it wasn't truly a nominating committee. It lost its influence as the tax rate crept up, and it continued to disregard costs. People began to look for the 'man on the white charger'." It should be noted, however, that in both cases the machinery which was dropped was not formalized and had not guaranteed a hearing for all elements in the community.

Two of the effective schools have continued the operation of nominating committees. Both were able to, and did, describe the committee's composition, the criteria it used, and its procedures in considerable detail. In one case, our interviewers were supplied with printed materials which had been circulated throughout the community by the nominating committee.

Significant to us, however, is that of the ten effective boards, four had had the benefit of nominating machinery to select the majority of their current members. None of the seven ineffective boards were using or had used any nominating machinery, either formal or de facto.

Other Methods of Selection. What was the process in the twenty-two schools which have not employed nominating machinery, and in the two which have recently dropped their de facto arrangements? We asked our respondents this question: "Formal procedures aside, who decides who should run?" (In these cases, the "formal procedures" referred to the standard legal requirement that candidates file petitions with a certain number of voter signatures.)

There was variation of perceptions of "who decides" within each district. Table 3 represents the answer of the majority of respondents in each district.

In the absence of nominating machinery, therefore, several alternatives have been used. It is common for the Board itself to discuss, screen and recruit its own successors. One respondent described the process this way:

> "Most of the members are more or less picked by the board. I'm ashamed of it, but it seems to be the only way to get good people."

Board selection of board members is as common with effective boards (3 of 10) as with ineffective (2 of 7).

Table 3

Responses to "Who Decides Who Should Run for Board Membership," by Number of School Districts (Schools Currently Using Formal or De facto Nominating Committees are Excluded)

Procedure as Described by Majority of Respondents	*Number of Schools*		
	General N=24	*Effective* N=8	*Ineffective* N=7
The Board itself decides	8	3	2
Pressure groups decide	5	1	2
Individuals or small neighborhood groups decide	11	4	3

One selection-orientation technique was unique among the schools in our sample, and should be cited here. One of the effective school boards appointed a large number of advisory citizens committees, not only for the more effective public relations such practice reaps, but also as a deliberate attempt to develop, test and train future board members. One of the respondents in that system proudly explained:

> "Citizens committees work very well: the community has plenty of experts. We feel that we ought to have a hundred laymen almost as knowledgeable as the Board itself."

Where the Board itself does not fulfill this function, pressure groups of many kinds often act as nominators. These may be taxpayers' groups of more or less durable natures or temporary groups such as one, described indignantly for us, which demanded that a certain interscholastic sport be played by the school, even though almost no opponents in that sport could be located and scheduled to justify the expense.

The most common pattern in the absence of political nominating machinery is no machinery at all. Over a third of all schools in our sample reported that candidates themselves, with the encouragement of a few friends at the most, made the decision to run, secured the adequate number of signatures on a petition, and ended up on the ballot and often on the board.

To summarize to this point, it is clear that school boards do not employ regular nominating machinery, political or otherwise, for the most part. Instead, they leave the process of nomination to the Board itself in some cases, to pressure groups in a few cases, and to individual choice or small neighborhood groups in most cases. Members of four of the effective boards in our sample had been chosen by formal or de facto nominating committees; none of the members of ineffective boards had.

The Criteria for Board Membership. We were also curious to learn what criteria, if any, were used in the selection of candidates for the Board. All respondents were asked "what criteria [for the selection of candidates] are used?"

The answers to such a question are of course dependent on the perceptual framework of the respondent, and the duration and intensity of his familiarity with the process.

Table 4 indicates the nature of these responses.

The striking facts in Table 4 are these: 1) most board members and close observers of boards were unable to identify or discuss any criteria, written or consensual, by which board members are selected (one of these respondents replied to the question in this fashion: "the only requirement I know of is that they be able to read and write"); and 2) effective boards use both written and consensual criteria considerably more often than ineffective boards. The schools using written criteria, incidentally, were those employing formal nominating committees.

One test of the efficacy of criteria is whether they are known to external observers of the office, as well as to the incumbents themselves. We found that not only did effective boards more often have criteria for board membership but that their criteria were known to more of their close observers. 44% of the "close observers" in effective-board situations could and did discuss criteria then in effect; only 8% of the close observers of ineffective boards did.

Table 4

Initial Responses to "What Criteria are Used For the Selection of Board Members," by Type of Respondents

Initial Response	*General*		*Effective*		*Ineffective*	
	Board Members and Chief School Officers N=190	Close Observers N=97	Board Members and Chief School Officers N=72	Close Observers N=41	Board Members and Chief School Officers N=46	Close Observers N=24
No Response or "None that I know of"	74%	73%	60%	56%	85%	92%
"Written Criteria"	6%	4%	17%	10%	–	–
"Consensual Criteria"	20%	23%	23%	34%	15%	8%

We took an additional step, and analyzed the nature of the "consensual" criteria—that is, those criteria which respondents did discuss and which had developed in the absence of more formal standards.

Table 5

The Nature of Consensual Criteria Used for the Selection of Board Members, by Type of Respondents*

Criteria	*General*		*Effective*		*Ineffective*	
	Board Members and Chief School Officers N=48	Close Observers N=22	Board Members and Chief School Officers N=17	Close Observers N=14	Board Members and Chief School Officers N=7	Close Observers N=2
Represents a certain area within district.....	39%	27%	12%	21%	30%	50%
Represents a certain group in district.....	29%	14%	35%	14%	43%	50%
Has "character"..	10%	36%	18%	21%	–	–
Has previously acquired status in community.....	17%	9%	24%	14%	14%	–
Is of right political persuasion.....	–	5%	–	14%	–	–
Has good educational background	5%	9%	12%	7%	14%	–

*The Ns in Table 5 represent only those who reported the use of consensual criteria.

Table 5 records our findings. The most common requirements in these situations were that the candidate represent a certain area within the district (the so-called "Gentlemen's Agreement"), or that he be a representative of one or more interest groups. The stipulations that he have a sound character and a good educational background were much less often applied in such cases, although one yardstick frequently used was that he have already proved his leadership ability by success in community service of some kind or in his occupational field.

The evidence cited here permits us, we believe, to generalize that the selection process for school boards is unorganized and unsystematic for the most part. Few boards use any regularized nomination

procedures or apply definite criteria. The effective boards in our study do more of both than ineffective boards.

The Orientation of Board Members

Few would deny that to be an effective board member a person must learn a great deal about curriculum, school law, budgeting and a number of other subjects of special concern to the operation of schools. Our survey attempted to determine the extent and kind of orientation procedures being used, and to gain some notion of their relative value as perceived by board members.

We asked the chief school officers to judge, from their long experience with boards, how long it takes the average new board member to "get into high gear": "In general, how long does it take a new member to learn to function adequately?" Most chief school officers (89%) felt that it takes more than six months; nearly half (48%) estimated that it takes more than a year; and over a third (40%) were sure that it requires at least 18 months. Indeed, three chief school officers (11%) estimated that the true orientation of new board members requires from three to five years. A few board members, although not asked this question as such, remarked that their first year or even their first term was chiefly a learning experience. One member commented: "it takes years of participation on the board...maybe it can't be done even in a five-year term."

We asked all current board members and chief school officers:

> "What formal and informal procedures exist for the orientation of new board members" and "How does one really 'learn the ropes?'"

Table 6 summarizes their responses. (Note that percentages exceed 100% in total, since each respondent usually cited several procedures.)

Obviously, except for the distribution of printed materials and occasional conferences with chief school officers or other board members, little of a formal or organized nature helped new board members to learn the task before them. No boards in our study had held what might be described as full, formal orientation meetings for their new members, although one of the effective boards was planning a series of such meetings in the near future. Two differences between effective and ineffective boards are worthy of note. In schools where board members are elected in May and take office in July, it was a frequent practice to invite members-elect to attend all board meetings in the interim. This was the case in five of the ten effective schools; 20% of effective-board members reported having availed themselves of this chance for a "headstart" towards orientation. Only one ineffec-

Table 6

Procedures for the Orientation of New Board Members, According to Current Board Members and Chief School Officers

Procedures	*General* N=190	*Effective* N=72	*Ineffective* N=46
Learn by attending meetings, doing the job	100%	100%	100%
Study printed materials (policy statements, handbooks, books)	59	64	59
Conference with chief school officer	29	29	30
Conference with an experienced member	24	29	26
Attendance at School Board Institutes	23	26	30
Attendance at "Commissioner's Orientation Program" in Albany	23	32	26
Prior service on citizens committees, or as officer of parents organization	18	37	16
Attendance at Board meetings as Member-Elect	13	20	4
Attendance at State School Boards Convention	10	11	9
Conference with the Board President	7	11	13

tive school reported such a policy, and only 4% of ineffective-board members reported having benefitted from the practice. Secondly, it was more often true that members of effective boards came to the task with prior knowledge gleaned from service with citizens advisory committees or parents organizations (37% to 16%). A substantial number of these were members of the effective board, mentioned in the previous section, which deliberately employs citizens committees as training-grounds for future board members.

To assess the relative value of various existing regional and statewide orientation programs, we asked board members this question: "As you know, the state and various local school boards associations put on programs for board members, issue publications and so on. Of these various services, which have you found most helpful?" Table 7 reports the number of respondents who mentioned different services as valuable to them.

Some variations can be detected between the responses of effective-board and ineffective-board members. The former, for example, apparently read the various New York State School Boards Association publications more often and found greater value in them, and attended School Board Institute programs more often. The most important feature of these data, however, is that board members in general do not avail themselves of these services as much as they might.

During the summer, the COEL Staff made an additional survey of existing regional or statewide programs of orientation for board mem-

Table 7

Current Orientation Services of Value, According to Board Members

	General N=163	*Effective* N=62	*Ineffective* N=39
School Board Institutes	35%	36%	26%
New York State School Board *Journal*	35	34	18
New York State School Boards Association *Bulletin*	22	15	16
New York State School Boards Association *Newsletter*	21	21	8
Area School Board programs (local or county groups)	20	15	13
State Education Department Orientation Program ("Commissioner's Conference")	14	15	5
School Management (periodical)	12	11	8
State School Boards' Annual Convention	11	11	13
National School Board *Journal*	9	6	18

bers. Consulting reports made by School Board Institute Directors, School Board Convention programs, and the programs and related literature of the Albany Workshops for New School Board Members (Commissioner's Conferences), the Staff established the following facts:

1. *The School Board Institutes.* Nine Institutes then existed, leaving two large regions without such service—the Catskill region (roughly Delaware, Otsego, and part of Sullivan and Ulster counties), and the Northeastern region (roughly Clinton, Essex, Warren and part of Hamilton and Washington counties.) An Institute is in formation for the Catskill region, probably beginning operation in 1965–66.

Aside from the two regions without Institutes, 48% of the boards in areas with Institutes do not participate in them, according to Institute Directors. Thus, about half of school boards in the State as a whole do not participate in School Board Institutes.

The great bulk of Institute programs are designed to provide information on specific topics of current interest—e.g. Russian elementary education or the dropout problem. Only two Institutes offered programs specifically designed for the orientation of new members. The Western New York Institute offers six separate sessions of this kind each year. The Central New York Institute sets aside part of one of its early meetings for that purpose.

Two Institutes formerly had special orientation sessions, but dropped them for lack of attendance. One other is considering instituting them this year.

2. *The State School Boards Convention.* The annual 3-day convention has in the past two years increased the number and variety of special interest clinics it offers. Several of these have been aimed specifically at assisting board members in the definition of their role and functions—e.g. "Differentiating the Lay from the Professional Role in Education."

However, probably because it is a single, 3-day meeting in one location, the Convention has been unable to reach the majority of board members.

3. *The Albany Workshop (Commissioner's Conference).* These one-day workshops, annually held in August, typically have a program as follows: a) greetings from the Chancellor or a Regent; b) an address by the Commissioner; c) presentations by speakers or panels on various topics such as "Nature and Extent of Local Control" or "The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965;" d) sessions designed to inform new board members of services available from the State Education Department; and e) a tour of the Education Building.

The Conference places heavy emphasis on acquainting new board members with the structure of the State's educational system, and the availability of State assistance to local boards. It publishes and distributes records of its meetings, and a pamphlet which in very general terms outlines "guiding principles for board membership."

Because it is held only at Albany and in August, the Conference is not attended by a majority of the new board members interviewed in the COEL study.

We may summarize briefly as follows: while regional and state meetings and publications do assist new members' orientation, little is done by boards themselves to speed up the learning process of their novitiates. Effective boards employ two orientation techniques not used to any great extent by ineffective boards: 1) members-elect are invited to attend board meetings prior to taking office; and 2) members-elect are often those who have worked closely with the board as members of citizens' committees. Orientation, however, is still chiefly a matter of on-the-job experience, with the result that much of a board member's first term is spent in learning the office.

The Organization and Processes of Boards

While the identification and recruitment of effective board members is COEL's central concern, it is true that the organizational and procedural contexts through which boards operate have some effect in either releasing or inhibiting the exercise of leadership.

Taking cues from the literature on school boards and from the experts we consulted, we included in our interviews a variety of questions about board organization and board processes. We wanted to see if effective and ineffective boards differed in certain specific matters: board size; the organization or use of meeting time; the extent to which citizen and teacher opinions are consulted prior to and following important decisions; the extent to which boards are given sufficient advance notice of important decisions to be made; and the care with which boards select their chief school officers.

This section reports our findings about each of these factors.

Board Size. Under New York State Education Law, boards usually consist of 5, 7 or 9 members. Table 8 indicates the size of the boards in our sample.

Table 8

Number of Five-, Seven- and Nine-Man Boards in the Study

Number of Members	*General* N=27	*Effective* N=10	*Ineffective* N=7
5	9	1	4
7	12	7	2
9	6	2	1

There was a marked tendency for the effective systems in our sample to use larger boards—all but one used seven- or nine-man boards, while only three of seven ineffective boards were of that size. Unquestionably this reflects the fact that our effective boards served larger communities, which often employ more board members than communities which are smaller. Nevertheless, we suggest that some merit be given the notion that larger boards may be more effective, probably because of the wealth of opinion and judgment they can devote to issues, and the more detailed attention a larger board can give to complex matters.

Use of Meeting Time. We have already indicated that boards meet from 10 to 12 hours monthly in regular or executive session and that with the added 7 to 12 hours of outside duties, this constitutes a major deterrent to potentially good members.

We developed questions by which we hoped to gain some idea of the way boards utilize their time in meetings.

The first was intended to learn how boards distribute their time among several functional areas:

This question asks you to think about the amount of time the board devotes to various kinds of matters. Listed below are some types of decisions boards deal with. Please indicate the approximate percentage of total board meeting time spent on each kind of decision.

	Approximate Percentage of Time
Budgetary (allocation of funds, approval of expenditures, etc.)	_____
Curriculum (content and method of instruction)	_____
Staff recruitment, review and dismissal	_____
Plant construction and maintenance	_____
Pupil services (transportation, lunch, etc.)	_____
Community requests and grievances	_____

Table 9 reports the average of the responses, according to current board members and chief school officers.

Some of the functions listed in Table 9 (curriculum; staff recruitment, review and dismissal) are quite directly related to the nature and quality of the educational program offered by the school. Others (budgetary decisions, construction and maintenance, and the supply

Table 9

Average Percentage of Meeting Time Devoted to Various Functions, According to Current Board Members and Chief School Officers*

Function	*General*		*Effective*		*Ineffective*	
	Board Members N=163	Chief School Officers N=27	Board Members N=62	Chief School Officers N=10	Board Members N=39	Chief School Officers N=7
Budgetary.....	26%	28%	28%	20%	29%	29%
Curriculum.....	17	16	19	23	13	14
Plant Construction and Maintenance..	15	12	13	11	15	14
Pupil Services.....	11	13	10	12	13	17
Staff recruitment, review and dismissal.....	11	10	11	11	9	12
Community requests and grievances.....	8	13	8	6	10	14

*Percentages do not total 100% in each case, because of "no responses."

of pupil services such as transportation and lunch) can be characterized as supportive ones, which implement but do not directly determine the nature of the education program.

Using such a distinction, we find that, according to board members in our sample, only a little more than a quarter of board meeting time (28%) is devoted to functions directly determining the nature of the educational program. Far more (52%) is spent in handling budget, construction, maintenance, transportation, lunch and the like. More will be said of this point in a later section.

Effective boards devoted more meeting time to currriculum (19%) and staff decisions (11%), than ineffective boards (13% and 9% respectively). They also used less time in handling community requests and grievances (8% to 10%). These were rather slight differences, however. Almost none of the boards in our sample devoted most of their meeting time to curricular and staff decisions.

All board members were also asked to estimate the proportion of meeting time devoted to important policy development:

> "How much of total board meeting time is devoted to important policy development?"

There were wide variations in responses, due to differing interpretations of the terms "important policy development."

According to the average of the responses of all the board members in the sample, only about 39% of board meeting time was devoted to what they feel is important policy. The rest, apparently, was either not important or not policy, as they saw it. This general estimate was about the same for effective and ineffective boards.

Two effective boards reported special efforts to budget their time more appropriately. One scheduled two regular monthly meetings—one for business and miscellaneous matters, and the other devoted almost exclusively to a continuing review and assessment of curriculum. Another reported that it handled business during the first hour of the board meeting, adjourned, and reconvened in executive session to discuss policy for the remainder of the evening. These, however, were exceptions. Most boards spend a considerable amount of their time in matters of lesser importance, according to board members themselves.

Our evidence, then, indicates that the burdensome time requirement associated with Board membership, which tends to deter potentially good candidates from service, is not competely necessary. By board members' own count, most of that time is spent on functions not directly related to the educational program itself, and most of it is not devoted to important policy considerations.

Decision-Making Processes. A series of questions in the interview were designed to determine the procedural techniques boards used in considering issues, making decisions, and assessing their effects. All board members were asked to recall a recent important decision made by the board, and then to "Please describe in detail how this decision was made... Is this the typical way decisions are made? If not, how is it different from the typical procedure?"

Responses were analyzed to determine the extent to which boards involve citizens and teachers, inviting them to express their opinions about issues before those issues were decided. We ascertained, from the responses to the questions above, what percentage of board members reported that they typically invite citizens and teachers' opinions via formal or informal hearings, invitations to attend meetings and express opinions, or through informal sampling of the views of key persons. Table 10 indicates the extent to which such practices are used.

At least according to the board members we interviewed, most boards did not systematically involve either lay or staff opinions in the process of arriving at decisions. Effective boards do more of both than ineffective boards.

Obtaining opinions and views in advance of decisions is only one aspect of the process; it is equally important that the decision-maker evaluate the effects of the choice once it has been made. We asked board members: "How does the board follow up the effects of its decisions? (How does it get 'feedback' from its decisions?)" Table 11 indicates the feedback channels reported to be in use by the board members in our sample:

Most board members, of course, mentioned that they received a kind of feedback whenever their telephone rang, or whenever they entered the barbershop or local restaurant. What we sought in our analysis was evidence of evaluative procedures other than the inevitable "hearsay" which reaches nearly all board members.

Table 10

Percentage of Board Members Reporting Regular Efforts to Obtain Citizen and Teacher Opinions about Important Issues

Response	*General* N=163	*Effective* N=62	*Ineffective* N=39
Typically seek citizens opinions about pending issues	28%	44%	26%
Typically seek teachers opinions about pending issues	21	24	16

Table 11

How Board Members Evaluate Their Decisions, According to Current Board Members

Responses	*General* N=163	*Effective* N=62	*Ineffective* N=39
Regular reports by the chief school officer.....	68%	63%	72%
Reports by individual Board members.....	40	26	36
Systematic inquiry of citizens and teachers.....	20	30	8

The chief channel of feedback was, as we expected, the reports, formal or informal, made by the chief school officer. In some cases, individual board members recited the effects of decisions to the whole board. Relatively few schools, however, used any form of systematic inquiry to obtain the direct reactions of teachers and citizens of the community. Effective boards more often arranged such feedback in some regular way. One, for example, employed the Cooperative Review Survey from time to time to determine what its citizens felt about the school. Another secured laymen's opinions by holding regular coffee hours in homes in each neighborhood of the district, with one or more board members in attendance at each. A third assigned one of its board members to talk briefly about the board's activities and answer questions at every parent-teacher organization meeting.

In coding responses to the questions about decision-making, we looked for evidence of procedures which guaranteed board members some advance notice of decisions which must be made. All receive agenda a week or two in advance, but few have more time than that to study issues. We discovered two exceptions. One chief school officer, of an effective board, opened the school year by presenting for board consideration a tentative list of objectives for that year. He and the board then maintained "back-up" folders focused on each of the objectives, and at mid-year held an evaluation meeting to assess their progress. A second chief school officer, also in an effective-board situation, regularly supplies board members with memoranda defining the issue to be decided and listing facts and arguments pro and con, *one month* in advance of the meeting at which the decision must be made.

To summarize the points made so far: the effective boards in our study tended to be larger in number than ineffective boards, to involve citizen and teacher opinion in the shaping of decisions more often, and deliberately to seek reactions to their decisions more often. Few boards arrange their use of time to devote more of it to policy developments

and matters of direct educational concern, or take unusual pains to guarantee themselves long advance notice of important decisions to be made. Finally, it should be noted that the burdensome time commitment presently levied on board members is probably unnecessarily large. Much of that time is, by board member's own admission, not devoted to important deliberations.

The Selection of the Chief School Officer. Certainly one of the most crucial decisions any lay board of control makes is the choice of its chief administrative officer. A public school board cannot itself supervise the everyday operation of the program; it must rely on a professional administrator. Furthermore, it is the administrator who works most closely with the board and executes its intentions, and works with parents and citizens almost daily. It seems essential that the board select its administrator with deliberate and extreme care.

We asked board members certain questions designed to obtain a description of the procedures our boards had used in the selection of their current chief school officers: "Did you participate in the selection of the present chief school officer" and "If yes, how did the board go about selecting him?" 33% of all board members could and did discuss the process; 35% of the effective-board members and 49% of the ineffective-board members recalled selection processes for us. We were able to obtain a description of the board's procedures from at least one respondent in 20 of the 27 schools, including 7 of the 10 effective and 5 of the 7 ineffective.

We realized that when boards select chief school officers, nearly all of them employ certain standard methods. For example, they announce the vacancy and invite applications; they screen credentials and recommendations in order to narrow the field to a certain number; and they interview these finalists, often visiting the applicant's present school before making a final decision. We were interested to see to what extent our boards had used additional techniques, commonly recommended in the literature, in their selection processes. We analyzed the responses to determine whether 1) the board had made a special effort to develop written, agreed-upon qualifications which would be sought in the new chief school officer; 2) whether the board had employed professional consultants, such as university specialists in selection, to assist them in their search; and 3) whether the board had involved citizens of the community by soliciting their advice or asking them to assist in the screening of applicants.

The number of respondents who described the process for a single board varied from one to seven. We used the analytical approach of attributing to a board a certain practice if that practice was included in any one or more of the descriptions given us. We recognize that

this gives us at best a very general profile, but we feel it is sufficient to enable us to make some important points about the selection process.

Table 12 reports the number of boards in our study which used these practices, according to one or more board members who recalled having participated in the board's selection of its chief school officer.

Table 12

Number of Boards Using Certain Selection Procedures to Choose a Chief School Officer, According to Board Members Who Participated in the Process

	General N=20	*Effective* N=7	*Ineffective* N=5
Development of written criteria	7	4	1
Use of professional consultants	8	5	2
Involvement of citizens or citizens committees; use of surveys	3	2	0

A number of observations can be made from our findings. Less than half the 20 schools, for whom we possessed descriptions of the process, made a special effort to develop written, agreed-upon specifications or standards by which the choice of a chief school officer would be made. To be sure, the members involved in the selection each had some mental image of the man needed and perhaps all the members had the same image, although that seems quite unlikely. The important point here is that in only 7 of the 20 schools did board members recall having discussed and developed criteria for the position of chief administrator which was to be filled. It should be noted that effective boards were far more inclined to do so.

Although a chief school officer must deal with the citizens of the community constantly, few of the school boards in our sample made a deliberate and systematic effort to involve citizens in the selection of the chief school officer. This is not to say that individual board members failed to seek any informal advice or opinions—they may have. We did find, however, that only 3 of the 20 boards utilized organized techniques for doing so, and that two of these were effective boards. One, for example, had established an ad hoc citizens committee which assisted in the development of criteria, the screening of applicants, and in some cases the final interviews.

The use of professional consultants is commonly acknowledged to be good practice when employing a chief school officer. That advice was followed by eight of the 20 schools for which we have information

(5 effectives and 2 ineffectives were included in the 8.) However, there exist some dangers in the practice. Consultants are usually asked to develop standardized interview questions for the board's use, to screen the multitudes of applications and credentials which pour in, and to recommend a certain number for final consideration. But we found evidence that two of the boards in our study had almost abdicated their selection responsibility to the consultants. Neither had specified criteria for the consultants' guidance. In one instance, the consultants proceeded without criteria to screen applicants and offer finalists. One member who recalled that particular case remarked that "the use of consultants was a good thing—they told us what we should be looking for." In the second case, the consultants came to the district, "read our school records and scrapbooks,...interviewed community organizations...then presented specifications for the Superintendent to be selected."

There is a fine line between using consultants' assistance and abdicating the board's own responsibilities to them. The two instances reported above suggest that that line may easily be crossed. The key point here is that in both cases the boards had failed to hammer out a clear description of the kind of administrator sought, leaving a void which the consultants filled.

To summarize, our evidence suggests that the selection processes boards use to employ chief school officers are not always as careful as they should be. Most do not develop definite criteria by which to choose; most do not employ professional assistance in the screening of applicants; and very few involve the community in the selection process in any organized way. Finally, it should be noted that while most boards which use professional consultants use them to *assist* in selection, some tend towards giving over a major part of their responsibility to these consultants.

The Role of the State

All the respondents in our study were asked this question:

"How do you view the amount of control which the state exercises over local boards?

_____ Far too much
_____ Somewhat too much
_____ Just about enough
_____ Not quite enough
_____ Far too little

Please explain your answer."

Table 13 charts their responses to the first part of that question. (The "observers" were the recently retired board members, parents' organization presidents and teachers' association presidents).

Table 13

Evaluation of the Extent of State Control over Local Boards, According to Board Members, Chief School Officers and "Observers"*

	General			*Effective*			*Ineffective*		
Response	Current Board Members N=163	Chief School Officers N=27	Observ. N=97	Current Board Members N=62	Chief School Officers N=10	Observ. N=41	Current Board Members N=39	Chief School Officers N=7	Observ. N=24
Far too much control.....	18%	7%	9%	21%	–	2%	13%	29%	17%
Somewhat too much control...	57%	26%	40%	50%	40%	41%	64%	29%	38%
Just about enough control.	21%	30%	30%	23%	40%	40%	18%	29%	25%
Not quite enough control.	1%	19%	8%	–	10%	5%	–	–	13%
Far too little control.....	–	–	3%	–	–	2%	–	–	–

*Some columns do not total 100%, due to "no responses"

Whether there is too much or too little control is entirely a matter of individual perception and opinion, of course. According to the board members we interviewed, there is too much control. 75% assessed it as "far too much" or "somewhat too much." Only one-fifth (21%) was satisfied that state control was "just about enough," and only two of 163 board members felt there was not quite enough state control. No board member said there was "far too little" state control.

The board members were not alone in their opinions. One-third (33%) of the chief school officers and one-half (49%) of the close observers sustained the objection.

Effective and ineffective boards differed little in their attitudes toward state control. 71% of effective-board members felt state control was excessive; 79% of members of ineffective boards did. Furthermore, observers of both types of boards held similar views, except that observers of effective boards were somewhat less likely to describe state

power as being excessive (43% to 55%), and were more likely to be satisfied with the arrangement (40% to 25%).

In short, board members and their close observers indicate that, as they see it, the state exercises too much authority over local boards of education.

When the study was designed, we did not feel safe in predicting which of the many aspects of State Education Law and Commissioner's Regulations might elicit objections. We could not use the approach of listing all possible sources of irritation and asking every respondent to react to each. We used a free-response question instead, asking the respondent to explain his attitudes towards state control.

The use of a free response question sometimes results in vague, unspecific answers which the respondent does not amplify. As will be seen in Table 14 (especially in the first and third responses listed), a number of board members objected to state control in very general terms: for example, "they don't understand the local problems boards face" or "too little policy is left to the local board." We read all responses carefully twice, and extracted from them as specific a description of the nature of board member's objections as possible. Table 14 presents a listing of these objections, and the number of board members who used them as explanations of their judgment that state control is excessive.

Analysis of the preceding table allows some generalizations. Aside from the vaguer objections expressed, three categories of dissent can be detected. The first revolves around the feeling that state requirements impose financial burdens which the local board is unwilling or unable to meet. Note, for example, the number who voiced disapproval of various salary requirements, the law placing principals' salaries in a fixed ratio to teachers' salaries, and the "5% take-home pay" law. 44% cited one or more objections of that kind. Some comments taken from the interview protocols illustrate:

> "The State...is prone to sponsor, or not oppose, legislation with built-in costs but without provision for payment."
>
> "They tell you you've got to do this and you've got to do that, but they don't help us enough financially."

36% of effective-board members and 43% of ineffective-board members were included in this group, the difference probably best explained by the fact that the latter were in generally smaller, poorer districts.

A second general objection is that state requirements tend to inhibit curricular experimentation, or act to depress the quality of instruction in some way. The complaints about mandated curricula, the effects of Regents examinations and the tenure law which protects inferior

Table 14

Objections to State Control, According to Current Board Members Who Felt the State Exercises Too Much Control over Local Boards

	General N=112	*Effective* N=44	*Ineffective* N=30*
In general, too little policy discretion is left to Boards	28 (25%)	8 (18%)	7 (23%)
Teachers' salary requirements are too rigid	24 (22%)	8 (18%)	7 (23%)
No allowance is made for varying local problems	23 (21%)	10 (23%)	6 (20%)
Regulations governing school construction are restrictive	22 (20%)	6 (14%)	2 (7%)
Law placing principals' salaries on ratio basis is unfair	16 (14%)	5 (11%)	3 (10%)
Too many curricular mandates are imposed	14 (13%)	8 (18%)	3 (10%)
The Master Plan for reorganization is too restrictive	11 (10%)	6 (14%)	2 (7%)
The "5% take-home" pay law is burdensome	9 (8%)	3 (7%)	3 (10%)
The tenure law protects inferior teachers	8 (7%)	3 (7%)	2 (7%)
Regents examinations inhibit experimentation, depress the quality of instruction	8 (7%)	4 (9%)	2 (7%)
Transportation regulations are too stringent	6 (5%)	1 (2%)	1 (3%)
Conflict of interest laws are unfair to board members	5 (4%)	3 (7%)	–
Accounting and reporting requirements are unrealistic	5 (4%)	2 (5%)	1 (3%)

Note: A number of other specific objections were made by fewer than 5 board members. These included such as "site selection requirements are difficult to meet;" "the state aid formula is unfair"; "the school cannot purchase second-hand buses, although companies contracting to bus children can."

*These Ns are the numbers of current board members who labelled state control as "far too much" or "somewhat too much."

teachers are examples. 27% of these respondents disapproved of controls of this kind. Some examples are:

> "In the area of curriculum, some of the requirements listed in school law could be dispensed with."
>
> "[They] tend to keep us in lock-step without much freedom to experiment, but this is improving."
>
> "I feel local boards are better qualified to set standards on academic matters. I realize that the Regents have to control many things, but these should be permissive and at the discretion of the local board, rather than mandatory."

34% of the respondents on effective boards made such complaints, while 24% of ineffective-board respondents agreed. There was, in other words, a tendency for effective-board members to object less often to

the financial implications of state control and more often to the educational implications.

A third important source of dissatisfaction was the various building and construction codes established by the State. 20% of all those objecting to state control mentioned these restrictions. Though most respondents were not so specific, we did find that a few such objections were based on the financial burdens such restrictions imposed, and a few on the fact that building restrictions hampered the freedom of the local board to experiment with different teaching arrangements.

In addition to the three major kinds of objections just discussed, a number of lesser complaints were registered against the Master Plan, transportation policy requirements, and the "red tape" of accounting and reporting. Of special interest is the fact that board members, like their observers, did not tend to see conflict-of-interest legislation as a major obstacle.

It can be said, in summary, that in the opinions of most of the board members in our sample, there is too much state control over their actions. Chief school officers and other observers supported this feeling, though to a lesser degree. Three major kinds of objection were that 1) state control imposes financial burdens which local boards feel they can't meet; 2) the state curricular controls and mandates limit the local board's ability to improve instruction; and 3) state construction requirements are unrealistic and inflexible.

The Board and the Chief School Officer

Division of responsibility between board and chief school officer has been a recurring and difficult problem for a long time. We were interested to see to what extent a clear delineation of functions had been developed by the boards we studied; which (board or administrator) was the leading force in each of several functional areas; and what kinds of issues or problems plagued the relationship between board and administrator. Included in our interviews were several questions designed to obtain such information.

Written Policy. It is often contended that if only school boards would develop written policies, confusion about their role and that of the administrator would be greatly reduced if not removed. Written policies can have two quite distinct purposes, of course: 1) to describe *how* a function is to be handled, and 2) to describe *who* is primarily responsible for that function.

The first of our questions was intended to determine if written policies existed and if they did fulfill the second purpose—that is, to see if they clarified, for board and administrator, which was responsible

for certain functions. The areas we listed were chosen because they are fairly discrete functional areas which are often defined in a written form:

"Does the board have a written policy assigning principal responsibility either to itself or to the chief school officer in each of the following areas:

Area	*No established policy*	*Chief School Officer Principally Responsible*	*School Board Principally Responsible*
Public Relations	_____	_____	_____
Selection of Staff	_____	_____	_____
Site Selection and Construction	_____	_____	_____
Salary Schedules	_____	_____	_____
Curriculum	_____	_____	_____
Staff Grievances	_____	_____	_____

Note: respondents were allowed to check both the 2nd and 3rd column to indicate that the written policy assigned the function to chief school officer and board jointly.

Our first step was to determine how many boards had written policies. It was natural that there would be disagreement about the existence of policy. Therefore, we analyzed each case using the criterion that if ⅔ of the respondents (board members and administrator) in a single school claimed the existence of a written policy in a given functional area, then we would accept as fact the existence of such a policy. Table 15 indicates the number of boards in our study which had written policies for each of the six functional areas, using the criterion just explained.

The response was encouraging. Most of the 27 schools reported the existence of written policies in each of the six areas. In general, effective boards were somewhat more likely to have them, but both effective and ineffective boards had apparently devoted considerable effort to the development of such policies.

Did these policies make clear who was primarily responsible for the specific function—the board, the administrator, or the board and administrator jointly? For analytical purposes, we decided to assume that a written policy "operated" to clarify responsibility if ⅔ of the respondents in a single situation could agree upon whether the policy assigned primary responsibility to the board, to the administrator, or to them jointly.

Table 15

Number of Boards Having Written Policies Assigning Functional Responsibilities in Each of the Six Areas, According to ⅔ Consensus of Current Board Members and Chief School Officers.

Functional Areas	*General* (N=27)	*Effective* (N=10)	*Ineffective* (N=7)
Public Relations	16	9	3
Staff Selection	19	10	5
Site Selection and Construction	15	9	3
Salary Schedules	21	10	6
Curriculum	19	10	6
Staff Grievances	21	10	7

Table 16 indicates the number of boards with policies which effectively operated to assign responsibility in each of the six functional areas.

Comparison of Tables 15 and 16 shows rather clearly that written policies, while they may have defined *how* a function is to be performed, did not clearly indicate *who* was primarily responsible. While 16 had written policies governing public relations, for example, in only 6 of these could ⅔ of the respondents agree upon who was primarily responsible for public relations under that policy. Further analysis shows a similar situation in each of the other functional areas. Suffice it to say that the existence of written policies *per se* did not remove all doubt about the respective responsibilities of board and administrator.

Table 16

Number of Boards Having Written Policies Which Operate to Assign Clear Responsibility, According to ⅔ Consensus of Current Board Members and Chief School Officers

Functional Areas	*General* N=27	*Effective* N=10	*Ineffective* N=7
Public Relations	6	1	1
Staff Selection	11	7	2
Site Selection and Construction	7	5	2
Salary Schedules	6	2	2
Curriculum	7	4	3
Staff Grievances	12	6	4

It should be noted that while effective boards tended somewhat more often to have "operating" written policies, the difference is not great. With effective boards, of 60 possible cases (six functional areas times 10 effective boards), 25 or 42% were cases where the written policy had produced substantial agreement on the assignment of primary responsibility. With ineffective boards, of 42 possible cases (six areas times 7 boards), 14 or 33% were cases in which the written policy truly defined primary responsibility.

Functional Leadership. Our second question attempted to gain some indication of which (board or administrator) was the leading force in the same six functional areas:

> "In actual practice, whose views carry the greatest weight in the important decisions in each of these areas? (respondents were allowed to check one or both "chief school officer" and "school board")."

Area	*Chief School Officer*	*School Board*	*Other (Specify)*
Public Relations	_____	_____	_____
Selection of Staff	_____	_____	_____
Site selection and construction	_____	_____	_____
Salary Schedules	_____	_____	_____
Curriculum	_____	_____	_____
Staff Grievances	_____	_____	_____

We hastily admit that "leadership" or "leading force" is a difficult concept to define or to measure. Ideally, we should have conducted a detailed small-group analysis of boards and administrators, over a long period of time and using refined techniques to record the relative amount of influence and weight the opinions of each carried. Obviously, such an intricate analysis was beyond our scope. We settled for a less sophisticated but fairly useful approach. We asked board members and administrators alike: "In actual practice, whose views carry the greatest weight in the important decisions in each of these areas?" Note that we asked about "important" decisions; we thought we could assume without asking that most minor decisions were delegated to the administrator. It would be highly unlikely, for example, that a school board would wish to concern itself with such decisions as whether the weekly newsletter should be on white or beige paper.

What we sought as a crude measure of the leadership in these issues, then, were the perceptions of board members and administrators as to which (board, administrator or both) exerted the main influence

in each area. Since these perceptions would vary, we decided once more to use the criterion that ⅔ agreement was sufficient to identify the source of leadership.

Table 17 records the source of leadership (that is, the origin of the important influence) in each of the six functional areas, for all the schools in the sample. The responses "Board" or "Administrator" mean that according to a ⅔ consensus, the board or the administrator, respectively, clearly carries the greatest weight in that function. The response "joint" means that, according to ⅔ consensus, leadership in important decisions was about equally shared by board and administrators. The response "uncertain" means that ⅔ agreement does not exist; in these cases the respondents were not sure where leadership resides.

Several conclusions may be generated from an analysis of Table 17.

First, in two areas—public relations and the determination of salary schedules—no clear leadership is attributed to either Board or administrator in a large number of our schools. In these two areas, where leadership *was* clearly recognized, it came about as frequently from the administrator as from the Board.

Second, board leadership is clearest in site selection and construction, where two-thirds of the schools indicated this is in the province of the board. Leadership came from the board next most often in the areas of public relations (9) and salary-schedule determination (7).

Third, and perhaps most interesting, is that by ⅔ consensus of the respondents in each school, the views of the chief school officer carry greatest weight in the areas of curriculum (24 of 27 schools) and staff selection (25 of 27).

We have already used an analytical distinction, in discussing boards' grievances against the state, which may be applied here with an appropriate amount of caution. Every decision of any importance made by a board and its chief school officer has both educational and financial facets, to be sure. Any decision to construct a building, for example, involves finances *and* has implications for the instructional program. A decision to adopt a new course of study carries with it financial obligations. Nevertheless, we feel that certain kinds of decisions more directly determine the nature of the educational program than others. Important curriculum choices and the selection of staff have a direct impact on the nature and quality of the training students receive. Decisions involving site selection, construction, public relations and the establishment of salary scales have less bearing on the school program, and perhaps are better depicted as implementing and supporting the program. If this is a valid distinction, then it becomes apparent from our study that, in our 27 schools at least, the chief school

officer's influence was strongest in decisions which directly determine the nature of the program (curriculum, staff selection), while the board's influence was strongest in those areas which implement and support the program (site selection, construction, public relations,

Table 17

Leadership in Important Decisions in Each of Six Functional areas, According to ⅔ Consensus of Current Board Members and Chief School Officers.

Area and Source of Leadership	*General* (N=27)	*Effective* (N=10)	*Ineffective* (N=7)
Public Relations			
Administrator	7	3	2
Board	9	3	3
Joint	–	–	–
Uncertain	11	4	2
Selection of Staff			
Administrator	25	10	6
Board	–	–	–
Joint	2	–	1
Uncertain	–	–	–
Site Selection and Construction			
Administrator	3	1	1
Board	18	5	5
Joint	–	–	–
Uncertain	6	4	4
Salary Schedules			
Administrator	6	2	2
Board	7	1	2
Joint	–	–	–
Uncertain	14	7	3
Curriculum			
Administrator	24	10	7
Board	–	–	–
Joint	–	–	–
Uncertain	3	–	–
Staff Grievances			
Administrator	16	9	4
Board	3	1	1
Joint	–	–	–
Uncertain	8	–	2

the determination of salary schedules). We will return to this point in the next section.

Problems Existing Between Boards and Chief School Officers. An analysis of replies to the two questions cited above indicates that although written policy seemed to exist in most of the schools we surveyed, it did not serve, for the most part, clearly to delineate certain functions as belonging either to the chief school officer or the board, or to them jointly. There was, in other words, still a great deal of doubt about who was assigned responsibility in certain areas. Furthermore, even when asked to describe who leads in actual practice, regardless of written policy, a degree of uncertainty was again reflected: in many cases, not even two-thirds of the respondents could agree on the source of leadership in several functional areas.

Anticipating that uncertainty and confusion as to their proper functions plague both boards and chief school officers, we asked this question of both:

> "Please describe what you feel is the chief problem between the board and the school administration in this district".

Table 18 charts the response:

Table 18

Problems Between Boards and Administrators, According to Current Board Members and Chief School Officers

Response	*General*		*Effective*		*Ineffective*	
	Board Members N=163	CSO N=27	Board Members N=62	CSO N=10	Board Members N=39	CSO N=7
Disagreement over the respective roles of Boards & Administrators.....	56%	60%	48%	60%	46%	71%
No major problem exist..	43%	11%	34%	10%	51%	14%
Disagreement over the education program.....	8%	7%	5%	10%	–	–
The other (Board or Administrator) wastes time on trivia.....	4%	19%	2%	–	–	14%
Disagreement over public relations.....	4%	4%	2%	–	–	–

Note: Some respondents indicated two chief problems, rather than one. Hence totals in some columns exceed 100%.

Almost half (43%) the board members were either unaware of a major problem between themselves and the administrator, or were unwilling to admit to one. Of the rest, the great majority described a problem revolving around the respective roles board and administrator should play. They described this in various ways: "....our problem is that there isn't a clear understanding of what the board should do;" "the chief school officer oversteps his bounds;" "there is lack of mutual trust, a good deal of suspicion."

Aside from this central and widespread concern over role and the division of responsibility, few other problems were discussed. Some reported disagreement over educational objectives or public relations actions, and some apparently were impatient with the trivial concerns of the other. But, almost overwhelmingly, where problems exist between board and administrator, they stem from confusion and uncertainty about the respective functions of each. Perhaps such problems are likely whenever such a work arrangement is established; what is striking here is the extent to which they are present. One speculates whether these problems could be ameliorated by a more determined effort to clarify relationships between professional administrator and lay board of control.

Interestingly, fewer effective-board members (34%) than ineffective-board members (51%) claimed that no problem existed. We are not entirely sure why this should be true. One explanation seems likely. If members of effective boards are themselves accustomed to leadership (our evidence suggests as much) and if they employ careful techniques to search out and employ highly competent administrators who are presumably also leaders, it seems sensible to assume that the confrontation of these two will produce sparks.

A summary of this lengthy section is in order. Although most of the schools in our study possessed written policies in each of six functional areas, these policies did not usually have the effect of making clear whether the board or the administrator bore primary responsibility for that function. Instead, in most of these functions there seemed to be an indefinite arrangement where board and administrator shared responsibility, or where responsibility was not definitely assigned.

According to our respondents, the major influence in matters of curriculum and staff stemmed from the chief school officer. The board's influence was most pronounced in site selection, construction, public relations and the determination of salary schedules. In many cases, respondents could not agree on the source of chief influence, again reflecting uncertainty and confusion about role and function.

Finally, both board members and chief school officers reported very frequently that a problem of role boundaries and role definition existed between them.

The Role of the Board of Education

The concept of local control of education, by a lay board which operates in close relationship with both the State and the local professional administrator, is probably best expressed in its ideal form as follows:*

Functional Responsibilities

State Education Department:
- Offers Advisory Service
- Approves courses of study
- Sets minimum standards
- Administers financial support

Board of Education:
- Establishes local goals and objectives
- Adopts bylaws and rules
- Acts as trustee of district's property and funds
- Prescribes courses of study
- Evaluates programs
- Appoints staff

School Administration:
- Selects staff
- Schedules space and staff
- Reports to board and to people
- Carries out local in-service program

The model above is admittedly intended as just that—a model. It oversimplifies in order to emphasize. Nevertheless, it serves as an excellent statement of the traditional concept of local control of education.

One may paraphrase the model by arguing that, in theory at least, the local board of education, operating within a framework of minimum standards set by the state, 1) prescribes a local curriculum; 2) appoints the professional staff to teach that curriculum; and 3) maintains a trusteeship over the district's financial and material assets. The professional administrator supervises the staff, reports to the board, and carries on a program of public relations.

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*Quoted from *The Local Board of Education: Background Information and Guiding Principles for Board Membership;* Albany: The State Education Department, 1965, p. 15.

Our evidence suggests that there is a considerable gap between the principle of local control by a lay board, outlined above, and the reality of the situation.

Boards apparently do not assume leadership in prescribing courses of study. They report that they spend only a little of their time and exert only small influence in such decisions. They admit that when such matters are determined locally, it is the chief school officer's influence which tells. One of their objections to state control, furthermore, was that the state has reduced the amount of local board discretion in matters of instruction.

Boards' power to appoint staff is apparently perfunctory. By board members own admission, staff selection is clearly in the administrator's hands; they recognize that his is the influential opinion in such decisions.

If the evidence of our survey is accurate, then the local board in fact does not lead in the establishment of courses of study or the selection of staff. Whether they can or should is of course another matter, outside the province of this study. Nor do we have evidence to explain *why* lay boards do not lead in these functions. It may be due to the increasing specialization of educational administrators and the reluctance of laymen to question professional advice*; it may be that board members are by inclination more interested in financial than in educational matters.** A host of explanations is possible.

If they do not perform their expected leadership role in the educational program, with what do local boards concern themselves? Our evidence suggests that they spend most of their time and exert most of their influence in matters financial: construction, the establishment of salary schedules, and various services such as transportation. We do not deny that such functions are necessary or that they should not be the province of the board. We simply wish to repeat that our evidence indicates that school boards expend more of their energy, time and influence in such matters than they do in areas of more direct impact on the educational program. In terms of the model above, boards most emphasize their function of acting as trustee of the district's property and assets.

When the expected and the real differ so much as they apparently do

*This is one of the arguments developed in a recent article which supports our contention that boards act to implement rather than determine educational policy: Norman D. Kerr, "The School Board as an Agency of Legitimation," *Sociology of Education,* 38, I, Fall 1964, pp. 34–59.

**This is a contention of John Wallace and Phillip Schneider in "Do School Boards Take Education Seriously?", *Saturday Review,* XLVIII, 42, October 16, 1965, pp. 89–90, 103. Both The Wallace and the Kerr articles are recommended to the reader.

here, confusion and uncertainty, and resulting hostility, are inevitable. Our survey revealed 1) that there is a considerable divergence between the traditional-theoretical role and the actual role of school boards; and 2) there is confusion, uncertainty and some degree of hostility between board and state, and board and administrator. We conclude that these facts are connected, and, further, that confusion and hostility could be reduced by a more realistic and clearer definition of the respective roles of state, local board, and chief school officer.

Summary of Findings

The purposes of this survey were two: to establish some characteristics of New York State school boards generally, and to suggest some ways in which effective boards differ from ineffective. We will summarize the results under these two main headings.

Board members in general seem to be motivated primarily by a genuine interest in the schools, or an impulse to render service to the community. Personally, they are of middle age, financially and occupationally above average, educated well beyond the average of their generation, and male, Protestant and Republican. They devote from fifteen to twenty hours monthly to board service, about half of that in actual meetings.

Some major obstacles exist which deter potentially effective persons from board service. Chief among these is the heavy time commitment required, a commitment which seems unduly large in view of board members' opinions that much of it is wasted on unimportant matters. A second obstacle is the public criticism and abuse board members must face, and often the resulting loss of business board members suffer. Some potentially effective members feel that boards can accomplish little in the present state of things; others are unwilling to campaign and risk public defeat.

School boards avoid the elaborate political selection processes of other governmental organizations, but no effective selection machinery has evolved in most school districts. In a very few, citizens' nominating committees have developed either formally or in informal practice. In some districts, the board itself selects its own successors. In most, selection is made by special interest groups or left to individual initiative. Few districts have developed any written or consensual criteria for board membership.

Although the true orientation of board members requires a year or more, little is done by boards themselves to shorten the learning period. Regional and statewide orientation services of high quality are available, but the majority of board members do not take advantage

of them. Literature is consulted and found valuable, especially that published by the New York State School Boards Association. The few orientation procedures which boards themselves have developed for their own members are limited and largely unorganized.

Most boards do not regularly consult citizen and staff opinion either in the development of policy or in its assessment once it is in effect. Board meeting time is probably used inefficiently, since most board members feel that a large part of their time is devoted to unimportant matters and matters only tangential to the educational program. Few boards guarantee themselves long advance notice of decisions to be made. Most boards, while using certain standard procedures in the selection of chief school officers, do not develop written criteria, involve citizen cooperation, or utilize professional consultants in the process. Two boards apparently over-utilized professional consultants, abdicating to them the board's own function of defining the district's needs.

Board members in our sample unquestionably feel restricted by state-imposed financial obligations and curricular mandates, and by what seem to them unrealistic construction requirements. Their objections to restrictive state control were sustained by their close observers, and to a lesser degree by their chief school officers.

Most boards in the sample have developed written policies, but these policies do not automatically make clear the roles of board and administrator. There exist in many of the board members' minds considerable uncertainty and confusion about their functions and the functions of the chief school officer.

In most of the situations we studied, the chief school officers' influence is strongest in matters directly determinant of the nature of the educational program (curriculum, staff selection). The board tends to spend its time and exert its influence more often in matters which implement and support, rather than determine, the instructional program.

Members of the boards we called effective differed from members of boards we called ineffective in several ways. They were financially more successful and more often employed in positions of leadership in business or as professionals. They had reached a higher level of formal education. Effective-board members tended also to be less actively engaged in external politics, to have been asked to run for board membership more often, and to have had longer experience on the board.

The effective boards in our sample were located in larger, wealthier districts than the ineffective boards. The people who elected them were themselves financially more successful and better educated.

Effective boards were more likely to have used formal or de facto

nominating committees to select and recruit board members. They were also more inclined to have developed some consensus, among interested citizens, of the qualifications a board member should have.

Though both lack effective orientation procedures, effective boards more often employ practices which assist their new members in learning the complex art of boardsmanship. Several elect members in May and encourage their attendance at meetings before they take office in July. Some utilize citizens committees as informal training grounds for future board members.

Neither effective nor ineffective boards feel that they use meeting time to best advantage. Effective boards more often rearrange their use of time to devote more of it to educational policy; more often arrange for longer prior notice of important decisions; and more often consult citizen and staff opinions about important decisions. Effective boards employ more careful methods, including the development of written qualifications, in the selection of their chief administrators.

Both types of boards feel hampered by state controls of various kinds. Furthermore, in both types, the board tends to devote its time to and exert its influence over matters not directly related to the nature of the educational program. Their chief school officers wield the strongest influence in curriculum and staff selection.

Neither kind of board has developed written policies which clearly divide major responsibilities between board and administrator. Effective boards have done so somewhat more often, but in both effective and ineffective boards there is still a substantial degree of confusion and uncertainty about the proper roles of board and administrator.

All respondents were asked twice to suggest recommendations for the improvement of school board leadership. This question was the last one on the Personal Data Questionnaire:

> "As you know, the Committee on Educational Leadership is seeking ways to improve the quality of leadership exercised by school board members. Do you have any recommendations to offer?"

At the close of the interview, each respondent was asked again:

> "In the Personal Data Questionnaire we sent you, we asked for any recommendations you might offer the Committee on Educational Leadership in its attempts to improve school board leadership. Do you have any other recommendations?"

When a person is asked to recommend ways to improve a situation, his replies reflect what he feels is wrong with that situation.

Table 19 lists the major recommendations offered by our 287 respondents, and the percentage who cited each. They are listed here as a summary of the weaknesses our respondents detected in the present state of affairs.

Table 19

Recommendations for the Improvement of School Board Leadership, According to 287 Board Members, Retired Board Members, Chief School Officers, Parents Organization Presidents, and Teachers' Organization Presidents

Recommendation:	*Percentage of all Respondents Offering the Recommendation:* (N=287)
The qualities needed for board membership should be more widely publicized	32%
Written definitions of the roles of Board and Administrator should be developed	24%
Area and statewide orientation programs should be expanded	20%
The State should clearly define the functions of Boards	14%
The State should publicize board service and the requirements for board membership	11%
Orientation literature should be distributed more effectively	10%
Screening or nominating committees should be used	10%
State Education Law should be revised to eliminate petty or burdensome requirements	8%

APPENDIX

Summary of Personal Information About Current and Recently Retired Board Members

	All Current & Recent Boards Members (N=209)	Current and Recent Members of Effective Boards (N=79)	Current and Recent Members of Ineffective Boards (N=51)
Age: Range	27–77 yrs.	30–67 yrs.	27–67 yrs.
Average	47 yrs.	45 yrs.	44 yrs.
Sex: Male	183 (88%)	66 (83%)	46 (90%)
Female	26 (12%)	13 (17%)	5 (10%)
Marital Status			
Married	206 (98.5%)	79 (100%)	51 (100%)
Divorced	1 (.5%)	–	–
Single	1 (.5%)	–	–
Widowed	1 (.5%)	–	–
Board Members with Children Enrolled in same school	153 (73%)	56 (71%)	39 (76%)
Religious Preference			
Protestant	149 (72%)	55 (70%)	38 (74%)
Catholic	41 (20%)	14 (18%)	10 (20%)
Jewish	10 (5%)	6 (8%)	2 (4%)
Political Preference			
Republican	154 (73%)	58 (73%)	42 (71%)
Democrat	48 (23%)	17 (23%)	9 (29%)
Extent of Political activity in last 10 years.			
Voter only	107 (52%)	43 (54%)	20 (40%)
Voter *and* active campaign worker or candidate for other office	102 (48%)	36 (46%)	31 (60%)
Educational Background (highest level achieved)			
Doctoral degree	12 (6%)	5 (6%)	4 (8%)
Masters Degree	31 (15%)	18 (22%)	5 (10%)
Bachelors Degree	66 (32%)	33 (42%)	14 (27%)
High School Diploma or 2-year certificate fro a college or trade school	96 (45%)	23 (30%)	26 (51%)
Did not complete high school.	4 (2%)	–	1 (2%)

	All Current & Recent Board Members (N=209)	Current and Recent Members of Effective Boards (N=79)	Current and Recent Members of Ineffective Boards (N=51)
Occupation (13 largest categories)			
Business officials, proprietors.	67 (32%)	31 (39%)	11 (22%)
Engineers (professional degrees)	23 (11%)	11 (14%)	4 (8%)
Farmers	22 (11%)	5 (6%)	7 (14%)
Homemakers	18 (9%)	8 (10%)	5 (10%)
Lawyers	11 (5%)	4 (5%)	3 (6%)
Technicians, skilled workers.	11 (5%)	4 (5%)	5 (10%)
Educators (prof., teachers, administrators)	10 (5%)	6 (7%)	2 (4%)
Clerical workers (accountants, stenographers, etc.)	8 (4%)	3 (4%)	2 (4%)
Laborers	5 (2%)	–	–
Scientists & researchers	5 (2%)	5 (6%)	–
Government workers	5 (2%)	–	1 (2%)
Dentists and physicians	4 (2%)	–	3 (6%)
Labor foremen	4 (2%)	–	4 (8%)
Average Annual Income	$14,000	$17,100	$11,400
(Asked of current board members only:)	(N=163)	(N=62)	(N=39)
Hours devoted per month to board meetings (average)	10	11	10.4
Other responsibilities as a board member (average time)	8.1	10.6	7
Number of years service on Same board prior to July, 1964			
0–1 year	51 (31%)	18 (29%)	16 (41%)
2–4 years	50 (30%)	25 (40%)	12 (31%)
5–9 years	44 (27%)	11 (18%)	10 (26%)
10 years or more	18 (11%)	8 (13%)	1 (3%)
Average	4.5 years	4.4 years	3 years